Gambling Treatment Program

The Louis Stokes Cleveland Department of Veterans Affairs Brecksville Division

Serving Pathological Gamblers Since 1972

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PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is made available to help answer a number of questions that gamblers and their families have frequently asked about hospital treatment for pathological or compulsive gambling. We urge the prospective patient to study this material carefully. Our experience has shown us that gamblers are usually impulsive people who are not likely to study this text. So, if you are a gambler considering treatment, the first step is “good” preparation. Read this material thoroughly and do some serious thinking about why you are in need of help, what you expect to get out of treatment, and what you are willing to put into treatment. Compulsive gambling is a disorder of impulse control and there is no impulsive or quick cure for a disorder of impulse control.
WHAT IS PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING?

Compulsive gambling is the commonly used term for the official diagnosis of pathological gambling. Pathological gambling was formally included as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. Since that time treatment professionals and the general public have come to recognize pathological gambling as an addiction similar to alcoholism or drug dependency. If left untreated pathological gambling, like other addictions, is a progressive and potentially fatal disorder.

- Pathological gamblers become addicted to the feelings associated with gambling, or being “in action,” much the same as substance abusers become dependent on the effects of drugs or alcohol. Gamblers may also need to spend increasingly larger amounts of money or time gambling to get the same “high” or sense of relief they initially experienced when their gambling began. As the disorder progresses, addicted gamblers may begin to take greater risks to make sure they have the money necessary to continue gambling. As the compulsive gambler spends increasingly more time, energy, and money on gambling and associated activities, loss of families, friends, jobs, health and sanity becomes a real threat. Depression, prison, and suicide frequently pose real dangers to pathological gamblers advanced in the progression of the disorder.

- Pathological gambling, like other addictions, is a treatable disorder. There is no cure, but it can be arrested and remain in remission if the gambler is willing to engage in the process of change and recovery.
TREATMENT PHILOSOPHY

We believe that pathological gambling is a treatable psychiatric disorder. Compulsive gambling disrupts the individual’s ability to function mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Therefore, treatment needs to address not only the gambling, but also to help the gambler develop more effective means of functioning in all aspects of living. This involves changing dysfunctional beliefs, behaviors, and emotional states that contribute to addictive behavior. Our program believes in the importance of Gamblers Anonymous and other 12 Step programs in the recovery process. Gamblers Anonymous properly focuses on the gambling and closely related problems. Our treatment program addresses a broad range of emotional, social, vocational, and health issues related to recovery and abstinence without losing sight of the addiction(s).

By combining a period of intensive therapy with a strong introduction (or reintroduction) to Gamblers Anonymous we hope to initiate a process of recovery that includes behavioral change, emotional development and personal growth. Once this process has begun vocational and social re-development may become additional goals.
WHEN SHOULD A GAMBLER SEEK INPATIENT TREATMENT?

The following is a list of the more common circumstances under which inpatient treatment for compulsive gambling should be seriously considered:

- When a gambler is seriously depressed and/or is having suicidal thoughts.
- When a gambler is experiencing severe anxiety, panic or desperation.
- When a gambler has not been able to maintain abstinence from gambling using GA or outpatient treatment.
- When a gambler has substance abuse problems co-existing with compulsive gambling.
- When a gambler is considering committing violent or illegal acts related to his/her gambling behavior.
- When GA is not accessible for regular attendance.
- When underlying emotional or psychological problems make it difficult for the gambler to utilize GA resources.
- When a compulsive gambler has a co-existing psychiatric diagnosis such as schizophrenia or manic-depressive disorder.
- When situational pressures make it impossible to focus on recovery on an outpatient basis.
- As part of the process of facing legal consequences related to gambling.

Being hospitalized is not to be viewed as another form of “bail out.” It is not a “get out of jail free” card, nor is it a homeless shelter. Also, it is not a place to hide from creditors or the sheriff.
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Brecksville Gambling Treatment Program was the first program for compulsive gamblers in the United States. Founded by Dr. Robert Custer in 1972, the GTP has remained an innovative, comprehensive program for the treatment of gambling problems. Veterans in treatment participate regularly in on-going research thereby adding to the growing knowledge and understanding of compulsive gambling.

The GTP is one component of a larger Substance Abuse Division that has residential and outpatient services available. All patients entering the Substance Abuse Division must be stabilized medically and psychologically before arriving for gambling treatment. Recent relevant hospital summaries, physical examination, and current medications or therapies will be requested to provide information about individual treatment needs. Residents in GTP share facilities with veterans who are seeking treatment for other addictions, and many veterans come to treatment with other co-existing psychological or emotional problems. The first day of the program will be spent in an orientation to the program, brief physical evaluation and psychological testing.

Individualized treatment plans are developed and implemented by involving both the veteran and the treatment team in the planning. The testing and interviews are helpful in gaining information to better meet each veteran’s individual treatment goals. Results are reviewed individually for each gambler in the program.

The intensive treatment phase of the program is 28 days beginning with day 2. Treatment activities include intensive group therapy, individual therapy and marital/family counseling. Patients participate in topic focused discussion groups, lectures, and classes on addiction and the recovery process. The program structure provides opportunities to practice self-discipline and responsibility. The program also includes Gamblers Anonymous and other Twelve Step meetings. Tardiness, absences, and incomplete assignments may result in discharge from the program.

- **Medications.** Please bring about a week’s worth of your own medications when you come to the GTP. You will be medically and psychiatrically evaluated on admission and your medications will be prescribed through our pharmacy.
- **Family Involvement** Patients are strongly encouraged to involve family and significant others in the treatment process. In-person and telephone conferences (for out of state patients) provide an opportunity for family members to ask questions, express concerns and feelings, and receive information about the disorder of pathological gambling. Family contact also helps in the assessment of issues that need to be addressed in the recovery process. Family and friends are also encouraged to attend Gam Anon, a twelve step support group for people who are concerned about another person’s gambling. Please realize, however, we cannot release any information about a patient without his/her consent.

- **Residential Treatment** The Substance Abuse Division is part of a large neuropsychiatric hospital. As previously indicated, you will be housed with patients receiving treatment for substance abuse as well as other gamblers. Two to four patients share rooms on a unit with 35 beds. We are a residentially based program relying on a minimal number of medical staff, therefore, the focus of your treatment will be your gambling addiction, not resolving your long standing medical problems.

- **Program Rules and Regulations** Living in accord with reasonable and useful rules is an essential skill and part of our program. Each new patient will receive a copy of the unit rules and regulations. Adherence to these policies is expected and those who disregard or violate them will promptly be discharged. These rules are not difficult to follow for those sincerely interested in making positive changes in their lives.

- The goal of the GTP is to assist the compulsive gambler in abstaining from gambling. Our rules prohibit gambling and activities strongly associated with gambling such as playing cards, pool or bingo.

- **Visiting Hours** Visiting is permitted on all federal holidays and on weekends from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Additionally, brief visits may be permitted if approved by your treatment team.

- **Passes:** You may be allowed passes on the weekends if approved by the GTP staff.
Eligibility

Eligibility for VA services at the Cleveland VA will be determined as part of our screening process. There are several factors that may effect eligibility including period of service, type of discharge, whether or not a veteran has a service connected disability and income level. Your eligibility will be verified prior to setting an admission date.

Your current medical records will also be reviewed by our physician to assure that you are medically appropriate to participate in the GTP.
How to Apply

No applicant is accepted into treatment without an initial screening. This can be done by telephone or in person. Other professionals wishing to make a referral are, of course, encouraged to do so but screening with the prospective patient is still necessary. This interview generally takes from 30 to 60 minutes. For additional information or to arrange screening please phone any of the numbers listed below:

- VA Medical Center, Gambling Treatment Program, Brecksville, OH (440) 526-3030 ext. 6847, 7225, or 6962

No Emergency Admissions This facility will not accept emergency admission to the Gambling Treatment Unit. Gamblers in emotional crises should consider emergency treatment at the nearest psychiatric facility or hospital emergency room. Referral to our treatment program can be made after the immediate care needs of individuals are met. We frequently have an admission waiting list and must respect the order in which a gambler’s name was placed on that list. Adherence to this policy serves to protect our interest in treating each patient with fairness. Most applicants can continue to work and attend Gambler’s Anonymous meetings until their scheduled admission date.
Admission to the Unit

- **Admission must be arranged in advance.** Admissions are between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12 noon Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday. No admissions are accepted on federal holidays or after customary “business hours.” Late arrivals will lose their reserved beds and their names will be placed on a waiting list for the next available bed.

- Casual and easy to care for clothing is all that is required. We ask that you do not bring any clothing that has gambling related logos (casino t-shirts). Residents have a washer/dryer and iron available on the unit. The hospital can supply PJ’s, towels, etc. **Bring your own** toiletries (shampoo, toothpaste, etc.). All meals are provided. No TV’, tape recorder, razor blades, laptop computers or electronic devices are permitted. You may, however, bring disposable razors and personal radios with earphones. Also, consider our beautiful northeast Ohio winters when your stay may be during the cooler months. Topcoats, gloves, etc. are suggested. Cell phones are prohibited on hospital grounds. Please do not bring valuables. Likewise, it is suggested you bring only small amounts of money that can be kept on your person. You may deposit money for safe keeping in “Patient’s Funds” and withdraw it on an as needed basis. Check cashing of any kind is very difficult. A waiting period of 10 days is required for checks to clear and money to be tendered.

- **Where to Report** Ours is a large hospital complex. Building numbers are located directly above the main entrances for easy identification. For admission report to the 2nd floor of Building #2, Wing 22A. When reporting there inform the clerk of your scheduled admission into the Gambling Treatment Program. Remember, admissions must be arranged in advance.
Directions to the Hospital

- **Location** This program is offered at the Brecksville Division of the Cleveland Veterans Administration Medical Center. The Brecksville Division is 15 miles south of Cleveland, Ohio on State Route 21. (The Wade Park Division of the Cleveland Veterans Administration Medical Center, a medical-surgical hospital, is located in Cleveland.). The Gambling Unit is located in the Veterans Addiction Recovery Center, Building 2.

- Brecksville is about three miles north of Exit 11 of the Ohio Turnpike on State Route 21 (Brecksville Road). Interstate 77, runs north and south past Brecksville. Admitting is in Building #2.

- **Local Transportation** From Cleveland Hopkins Airport, take “RTA” (Rapid Transit Authority) to downtown Cleveland from the airport. Be sure to ask for a transfer when you pay to get the train. Get off the train at the Terminal Tower in downtown Cleveland. Come up out of the building to Public Square and catch a #77 Brecksville bus. The driver will let you off at the hospital. Total travel time is about 90 minutes. A cab from the airport to the hospital may cost up to $40.00. RTA is approximately $1.50.

- We DO NOT provide transportation monies to or from the GTP.

- See attached map.
10000 Brecksville Rd.
Brecksville, OH 44141
(440) 526-3030

**From I-77:**
Go South on I-77 to Miller Road exit. Turn left at the light. VA grounds are approximately a fourth of a mile on the left. Turn into VA entrance.

**From I-80 Ohio Turnpike:**
From I-80 Ohio turnpike exit at #173. Exit to the left onto Brecksville Road. Turn left onto Miller Road. Next right will be entrance to VA grounds.

**From 480 West:**
Exit on 77 South. Exit on Miller Road, turn left, VA is on the left.

**From Wade Park VA to Brecksville VAMC:**
Take MLK Blvd. to 90 West. Take 77 South exit and go to Miller Road exit. Turn left at the light. VA grounds are approximately a fourth of a mile on the left. Turn into VA entrance.