

Addiction Is a Chronic Disease Says HBO Addiction Project

HBO program on drug and alcohol addiction and the outreach to promote it

SUMMARY

Throughout March 2007, HBO ran a 90-minute documentary, "Addiction," as part of the Addiction Project that aimed to increase awareness that addiction is a chronic brain disease. The Addiction Project also included a 13-part series of supplementary films, four independent documentaries, a book, an interactive website and podcasts. In addition, Join Together distributed DVDs of "Addiction" to addiction treatment organizations and individual treatment providers.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the National Institute of Drug Abuse supported the 90-minute documentary and also funded a 30-city outreach around the Addiction Project. Join Together, Faces & Voices of Recovery and Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) conducted the mobilization effort to promote the series.

The Problem

As HBO notes on its website, one in four Americans has a family member who struggles with addiction. In 2005, there were 23.2 million Americans who needed treatment for their illicit drug or alcohol abuse problems, but only about 10 percent received the treatment they needed.

Although many television shows, both real and fictional, have captured the downward spiral of addiction, HBO staff stated that they "failed to explain to the public:

- What addiction really is (a brain disease).
- What causes it (a variety of genetic and psychosocial factors).
- How to get the best available treatment (by seeking out evidence-based medical and behavioral treatments)."

Results of the HBO Project

HBO used all of its digital platforms in showing and promoting the Addiction Project. These include the HBO main service, multiplex channels, HBO On Demand, podcasts, web streams and DVD sales. The major components of the Addiction Project were:

- A nine-part centerpiece documentary, "Addiction," aired on HBO in March 2007. See
 the Appendix for a list of the parts. It can be viewed online. It won the Governors
 Award from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in September 2007. This
 award is the academy's highest. It is given in recognition of programming that
 demonstrates commitment to important social causes.
- A supplementary series of 13 films. See the Appendix for a list.
- A complementary series of four independent addiction-themed films. See the Appendix for a list.
- A companion book published by Rodale Press, *Addiction: Why Can't They Just Stop?* edited by John Hoffman and Susan Froemke.
- A website on addiction, treatment and recovery.
- A national media campaign to promote the show and its themes. This included the production and dissemination of two guides to ensure a consistent message:
 - Maximizing Outreach Through Town Halls—A Planning Guide
 - "ADDICTION"—A Viewer's Guide

Key Results of the Outreach

Three organizations partnered with HBO on the Addiction Project outreach:

- Join Together, a program started at the Boston University School of Public Health
 that moved to Columbia University in 2009, provided information, strategic
 assistance and leadership development for community-based efforts to advance
 effective alcohol and drug policy, prevention and treatment. RWJF has supported Join
 Together since its inception. See Program Results.
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), the only national
 organization representing coalitions working to make America's communities safe,
 healthy and drug free. RWJF supported CADCA from 1992 to 2008. See Program
 Results.
- Faces & Voices of Recovery. This national campaign was founded by the recovery community in 2001 to change public perceptions of recovery and discrimination and to keep a focus on the fact that recovery works and is making life better for millions of Americans. RWJF supported the campaign from 2001 to 2008. See Program Results.

These three organizations conducted a grassroots outreach and community mobilization project consisting of town meetings, briefings and preview screenings; house parties; and other community-wide events in cities and towns nationwide.

- The outreach targeted 30 cities: Atlanta, Birmingham (Ala.), Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus (Ohio), Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Hartford (Conn.), Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City (Ks.), Louisville (Ky.), Los Angeles, Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, New York, Nashville (Tenn.), Orlando/Daytona Beach (Fla.), Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland (Ore.), Raleigh-Durham (N.C.), Richmond (Va.), Sacramento (Calif.), San Antonio, San Diego, Seattle, Tampa/St. Petersburg (Fla.) and Washington.
- Staff worked with HBO regional directors in 13 HBO Premier Cities that together held more than 30 premiers of the show: Albuquerque (N.M.), Austin (Texas), Birmingham (Ala.), Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Missoula (Mont.), Philadelphia, Raleigh-Durham (N.C.) and Washington. Join Together, in a report to RWJF, noted: "Most of the events generated overcapacity attendance, including prominent individuals in these communities."

Based on feedback from the website, reports from 30 target cities and anecdotal reports from individuals and organizations in all 50 states, the outreach campaign achieved the following:

- Web Site: Between February 6, 2007, and the end of September 2007, the website attracted 134,000 visitors (of whom 98,000 were unique) and 396 page views. Visitors came from all 50 states.
- Community Events
 - Organized events or house parties were held in 41 states, with 15,000 attendees.
 - The partners held 30 premiers in the 13 HBO Premier Cities.
 - Some 134 communities held town hall meetings, state capital presentations and briefings in 41 states.
 - More than 200 "event forms" reporting on particular events were submitted to the website.
 - The project staff sent 19,000 viewer's guides and 8,200 town hall meeting planning guides to communities.
 - Project staff held editorial board meetings in most cities.
 - The events generated media articles and publicity. For example, Clear Channel in Miami ran 70 public service announcements and Telemundo Spanish TV covered the premier. The *St. Petersburg Times* ran an article about the HBO documentary that reached 1 million households.

- Addiction, Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Communities:
 - The National Council of Alcohol and Drug Dependence created a curriculum using the film.
 - Members of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals are using the "South Boston Drug Court" film to educate their members. The Rochester, N.Y., court hosted three community events to show the film. The New England Association of Drug Court Professionals selected the Addiction Project theme for its two-day annual conference in 2007, with a plenary showing of "South Boston Drug Court" followed by a panel discussion with participants in the film.
 - The National African American Drug Policy Coalition sent delegations to the premiers and promoted activities around the HBO show.
 - Join Together distributed 11,000 DVDs of "Addiction" to addiction treatment centers registered at the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). HBO provided the DVDs at a deep discount, decreasing the cost of the distribution program.

Funding

RWJF provided one contract to Home Box Office for \$745,000 to produce "Addiction," and two grants totaling \$889,088 to Join Together at the Boston University School of Public Health for the outreach campaign and distribution of the DVDs.

After the Grant

Stories about the "Addiction" series continue to be shown on the Join Together website; the partner organizations continue to work with local organizations on ways to continue to take advantage of the HBO show. The HBO special "Addiction" is still available online.

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APPENDIX

The HBO Addiction Film Series

All films are available online.

Addiction: Centerpiece Documentary

- Saturday Night in a Dallas ER
- A Mother's Desperation
- The Science of Relapse
- The Adolescent Addict
- Brain Imaging
- Opiate Addiction: A New Medication
- Topiramate: A Clinical Trial for Alcoholism
- Steamfitters Local Union 638
- Insurance Woes

The Supplementary Series

- What is Addiction?
- Understanding Relapse
- The Search for Treatment: A Challenging Journey
- The Adolescent Addict

- An Interview with Nora D. Volkow, M.D.
- An Interview with Mark L.
 Willenbring, M.D.
- An Interview with Michael L. Dennis, Ph.D.
- An Interview with Kathleen T. Brady, M.D., Ph.D.
- Getting an Addict into Treatment: The CRAFT Approach
- Treating Stimulant Addiction: The CBT Approach
- Opiate Addiction: Understanding Replacement Therapy
- South Boston Drug Court
- A Mother's Desperation

The Complementary Series

- TV Junkie
- Cracked Not Broken
- Montana Meth
- A Revolving Door

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Books

Hoffman J and Froemke S (eds). *Addiction: Why Can't They Just Stop?* Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 2007.

Reports

"Addiction." The centerpiece documentary contains the following segments. New York: Home Box Office, 2007. Available online.

- Saturday Night in a Dallas ER
- A Mother's Desperation
- The Science of Relapse
- The Adolescent Addict
- Brain Imaging
- Opiate Addiction: A New Medication
- Topiramate: A Clinical Trial for Alcoholism
- Steamfitters Local Union 638
- Insurance Woes

ADDICTION—A Viewer's Guide. New York: Home Box Office, 2007.

Maximizing Outreach Through Town Halls—A Planning Guide. New York: Home Box Office, 2007.

"The Complementary Series." New York: Home Box Office, 2007. Available online.

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- Cracked Not Broken
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"The Supplementary Series." New York: Home Box Office, 2007. Available online.

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- Opiate Addiction: Understanding Replacement Therapy
- South Boston Drug Court
- A Mother's Desperation

Communications and Promotion

www.hbo.com/addiction. The website of HBO for the Addiction Project.

www.addictionaction.org (no longer available). The website of the Addiction Project containing the films produced by HBO.