



National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse
and Alcoholism
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 7, 2007

NIDA Contacts: Dorie Hightower or
Sara Rosario Wilson
301-443-6245
media@nida.nih.gov
en Español: 301-594-6145

NIAAA Contact: Ann Bradley
301-443-3860
abradley@mail.nih.gov
en Español: 301-443-3860

NIH Partners with HBO on Groundbreaking Documentary on Addiction

90-minute program set to air on Thursday, March 15 at 9:00 p.m. ET/PT

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), components of the National Institutes of Health, have collaborated with HBO to create an eye-opening documentary, ADDICTION, to air on Thursday, March 15 (9:00-10:30 p.m. ET/PT). The documentary, developed with funding support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, seeks to help Americans understand addiction as a chronic yet treatable brain disease, and spotlights promising scientific advancements.

With nearly one in ten Americans over the age of 12 classified with substance abuse or dependence, addiction takes an emotional, psychological, and social toll on the country. The economic costs of substance abuse and addiction alone are estimated to exceed a half trillion dollars annually in the United States due to health care expenditures, lost productivity, and crime.

“The National Institutes of Health is proud to be part of this effort to educate Americans about the nature of addiction and its devastating consequences,” said NIH Director Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni. “We especially appreciate the opportunity to inform the public about the scientific research that is transforming our understanding and treatment of addictive disorders.”

Addiction is now understood to be a brain disease because scientific research has shown that alcohol and other drugs can change brain structure and function. Advances in brain imaging science make it possible to see inside the brain of an addicted person and pinpoint the parts of the brain affected by drugs of abuse—providing knowledge that will enable the development of new approaches to prevention and treatment.

“Addiction is a disease—a treatable disease—and it needs to be understood,” said Dr. Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, whose work is featured in the documentary. “Our goal is for HBO’s ADDICTION project to educate the public about this disease and thereby help to eliminate the stigma associated with it.”

Currently, addiction affects 23.2 million Americans—of whom only about 10 percent are receiving the treatment they need. “HBO’s Addiction Project offers us the opportunity to directly acquaint viewers with available evidence-based medical and behavioral treatments,” said NIAAA Director Dr. Ting-Kai Li. “This is especially important for disorders that for many years were treated outside the medical mainstream.”

Consisting of nine segments, the film presents an encouraging look at addiction as a treatable brain disease and the major scientific advances that have helped us better understand and treat it. From emergency rooms to living rooms to research laboratories, the documentary follows the trail of an illness that affects one in four families in the United States.

One segment, “The Adolescent Addict,” explains that the adolescent brain differs from the adult brain because it is not yet fully developed. According to NIDA’s Dr. Nora Volkow, adolescent brains may be more susceptible to drug abuse and addiction than adult brains. However, because it is still developing, the adolescent brain may also offer an opportunity for greater resilience. Although treatment can yield positive results, many families are unwilling to look outside the home for help due to concerns about stigma.

Medications for use in treating alcoholism also are a focus of the program, including a segment on topiramate, under study by NIH-supported researchers at a clinic in Charlottesville, Virginia. At present, there are three FDA-approved medications available to treat alcohol dependence: the older aversive agent disulfiram, and two newer anti-relapse medications. Naltrexone, available by tablet or monthly injections, interferes with drinking reward and reinforcement, and acamprosate works on multiple brain systems to reduce craving, especially in early sobriety. According to NIAAA’s Dr. Mark Willenbring, who is featured in the film, these medications are not addictive and can be helpful adjuncts to treatment.

NIDA and NIAAA have released these new publications to coincide with the launch of ADDICTION.

Drugs Brains and Behavior, the Science of Addiction

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/scienceofaddiction/>

Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician’s Guide

<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/guide>. Downloadable patient education handouts include *Strategies for Cutting Down*, *U.S. Adult Drinking Patterns*, and *What’s a Standard Drink?*

ADDICTION is directed by an HBO-assembled team of filmmakers including Jon Alpert, Susan Froemke, Eugene Jarecki, Liz Garbus, Barbara Kopple, Albert Maysles and D.A. Pennebaker among others. The documentary is part of a broader HBO Addiction Project that includes a supplementary series of 13 additional short films featuring extended expert

interviews and focusing on such subjects as family treatment and drug courts. All films will be offered March 15-18 at no charge by participating cable systems and available on numerous digital platforms including multiplex channels, podcasts, and web streams at www.HBO.com. The Project is being promoted by HBO and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in collaboration with national groups committed to addiction and recovery support, including Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, Faces and Voices of Recovery, and Join Together. More information can be found at <http://www.addictionaction.org/>.

#####

The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to ensure the rapid dissemination of research information and its implementation in policy and practice. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found on the NIDA home page at www.drugabuse.gov.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism is the primary U.S. agency for conducting and supporting research on the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol problems and disseminates research findings to general, professional, and academic audiences. Additional alcohol research information and publications are available at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH)—The Nation's Medical Research Agency—includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary Federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.