Drug and alcohol addiction creates a real and present danger to America’s employers. In raw numbers, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence reports that drug abuse costs employers $81 billion annually as addiction can lead to a drop in productivity, reduced product quality, increased absenteeism and higher healthcare costs. In addition, drug abuse can cause problems at work including after-effects of substance use (withdrawal) affecting job performance, preoccupation with obtaining and using substances while at work (interfering with attention and concentration), and illegal activities at work including selling illegal drugs to other employees.

The cost in human terms is even higher as an addiction can lead to failed marriages, broken homes, severe emotional problems and even death. Depending on the nature of the individual’s work, public safety can be jeopardized as well. Many people are surprised to learn that 70 percent of all Americans who use illegal drugs are employed. That equates to nearly 13 million individuals actively use drugs in the workforce. While employers and co-workers often want to help, the signs are not always easy to recognize, yet if gone undetected can have a grave effect on a company’s health. That makes it incumbent upon employers to take multiple paths in addressing this problem.

Here are four things employers can do:

1. Unknowingly hiring substance abusers costs employers money through poor work performance, frequent absenteeism, struggles with productivity, and above-average filing for workers’ compensation claims and benefits. This is often accompanied by improper workplace behavior such as blaming others for their own problems and shortcomings, deterioration in personal appearance or personal hygiene, needlessly risk taking, and disregard for safety of self and others. Employers can avoid this trap by conducting pre-employment drug testing with an independent, experienced company in their local area.

2. Employers are encouraged to develop and implement an effective workplace drug program that combines drug testing with education and specific consequences for violating the rules. Such programs have been proven to increase morale, decrease workplace accidents, reduce employee theft, increase productivity, reduce employee turnover, and decrease cost of insurance.

3. Education is critical as often addiction is the residue of other undetected problems. In that spirit employers should consider inviting specially trained therapists to come to the workplace and conduct “brown-bag” educational sessions on a host of topics including stress management, anxiety, work-life balance, depression, challenges of a working parent, and many others. Make sure you choose a therapist or counseling center with a track record of success and who will work your human resources department to tailor a program, free of charge to you and your employees that meets your exact needs. This is a value-added benefit you can offer your employees … and one everyone wins.

4. To support and provide help to employers who are addicted, employers should find a trusted local partner who can provide the addicted employees the counseling and therapy that is needed to break destructive cycles and move forward with their lives. While many options exist right here in the San Fernando Valley, one path that is becoming increasingly attractive is intensive outpatient therapy. In an outpatient setting people can continue to manage the day-to-day details of their lives, even while they access very real treatment for their addictions. Often like these become important motivators in reminding people of why they want to improve in the first place. In addition, outpatient care generally costs less, sometimes far less, than inpatient/residential care. While outpatient therapy isn’t right for everyone, it is often right for individuals seeking treatment for the first time; those seeking post-inpatient or continued support; and families who have a need to better understand the chaos, destruction and seemingly unexplainable behavior.

Work can be an important place to address substance abuse issues in ways that the individual, their family, employers and the community at large all benefit. And in doing so make the San Fernando Valley an even greater place to work and live.

Tracy Klass, CATC III, is co-executive director at inneractions in Woodland Hills. Visit www.inneractions.net for more information.
Early detection is crucial to treating breast cancer. With the Genius 3D mammography machines installed recently at Henry Mayo’s Sheila R. Veloz Breast Imaging Center, up to 41 percent more invasive breast cancers can be detected and false positives are reduced by up to 40 percent—which translates to early detection.

“We are thrilled to be able to provide our patients with the latest technology in mammography. Both the radiologists and the technologists love working with the 3D platform knowing that they are providing the best that there is,” said Terry Lynn Bucknall, Director of Women’s Imaging Services.

Genius 3D mammography, the first clinically proven, superior 3D mammography approved by the FDA, allows physicians to see masses and distortions associated with cancers significantly more clearly than conventional 2D mammography.

“Our radiologists have been able to detect cancers on studies that would not have been appreciated on the 2D studies and we have been able to eliminate some call-backs for further work-up, thus eliminating additional stress and worry for our patients,” Bucknall said.

The best available tool for breast cancer detection continues to be the mammogram. Taken over time, mammograms provide a way to identify changes in breast tissue, such as the appearance of a tumor. The Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center is designated as a Breast Imaging Center of Excellence by the American College of Radiology (ACR).

Appointments can be scheduled Monday through Friday, including lunchtimes and into the evening, as well as some weekends, by calling (661) 200-1099. The Breast Imaging Center is located at 23929 McBean Parkway, Suite 101, Valencia, CA 91355.
These aren’t just words for the team at Parker Brown. We treat every job we work on as if we are the owner. And our commitment helped us grow to our biggest year ever in 2014.

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Parker Brown for all your construction needs.
Individuals living with diabetes are at risk for developing serious complications, such as impaired blood circulation, nerve damage, foot ulcers and infections. In severe cases, numbness in the leg and foot can lead to injuries, non-healing wounds and infections. When these complications occur, doctors often recommend an amputation of the lower leg and/or foot. However, there are limb salvage treatments available.

**HEALTHCARE SPOTLIGHT**

By combining the expertise of on-site vascular surgeons and podiatric surgeons with experts in limb salvage and wound management, the APC provides the expert care necessary to help heal wounds, restore function and save limbs.

Get a Second Opinion
The Amputation Prevention Center (APC) at Valley Presbyterian Hospital offers hope to those who may otherwise
Transoral Robotic Surgery at Antelope Valley Hospital

When Raymond Vanholten retired from his job as a driver within the motion picture industry, he was looking forward to a well-earned respite from moving sets and equipment on a daily basis. Unfortunately, that was not to be. Two weeks after turning in his keys, he was diagnosed with throat cancer.

“I had a little bump on my neck for the last year and I thought it was a cyst,” the 64-year-old said. His primary care doctor put him on antibiotics but the bump did not go away. He was referred to an ear, nose and throat specialist, who prescribed stronger antibiotics – but the lump persisted.

He explained to his new doctor that he “had been feeling something catch at the base of my tongue when I ate.” Exploratory surgery revealed that Vanholten did in fact have a cancerous tumor, which started in his throat. A short time later, he underwent Transoral Robotic Surgery (TORS) at Antelope Valley Hospital (AVH). This robotic minimally invasive approach has distinct advantages to open surgery.

“Transoral Robotic Surgery is more precise than conventional surgery and allows the surgeon to more accurately reach all the margins,” said Dr. Satish Vadapalli. “This type of surgery is typically done on an outpatient basis, whereas open surgery requires a hospital stay. It’s only a 30-minute procedure and patients are back to full function within a week.”

During the second surgery, the surgeon employed a magnified high-definition vision system, a laser and tiny wristed instruments that rotate far greater than the human wrist. The robotic approach provides surgeons with enhanced vision, precision, dexterity and control. The technique allowed tiny instruments to be passed through the mouth to remove a piece of Vanholten’s tongue and throat to help ensure the removal of any remnants of the tumor.

While other cancers such as lung and colorectal cancers are on the decline, doctors are seeing a rise in throat cancer due primarily to the transmission of viruses. It can affect the throat, voice box, base of the tongue or tonsils. It is more common in adults over 50, and men are 10 times more likely to develop the disease.

“I’ve heard stories from other patients where their doctor had to keep cutting into their throat to get to the cancer on their tongue,” Vanholten said. “They spent as long as two weeks in the hospital.” Many of these patients have difficulty speaking or swallowing after conventional open surgery. Robotic surgery offers many benefits to the conventional approach. Because this procedure is performed through the mouth, there are no visible incisions. As a result, the recovery is quicker and patients spend less time in the hospital. TORS has been so successful in treating throat cancer that surgeons have also been using the technique to treat sleep apnea.

AVH provides comprehensive cancer care in conjunction with its community partners. The only other facilities in the Los Angeles area that are equipped to perform Transoral Robotic Surgery are USC Medical Center, Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center and Kaiser, making AVH a convenient option for cancer patients in northern Los Angeles County.

“After the first week, my neck was pretty much back to normal,” Vanholten noted. “Despite a little stiffness and numbness, which will likely go away over time, I feel lucky to have received robotic surgery.” And thanks to prompt and successful treatment of his throat cancer, he will be able to enjoy his retirement after all.

To learn more, contact Antelope Valley Hospital Community Relations at (661) 726-6499.
Physical Activity Programs Help Maintain Mobility in Seniors

Acarefully structured, moderate physical activity program can reduce risk of losing the ability to walk without assistance, perhaps the single most important factor in whether vulnerable older people can maintain their independence, a new study has found.

Older people who lose their mobility have higher rates of disease, disability, and death. A substantial body of research has shown the benefits of regular physical activity for a variety of populations and health conditions. But none has identified a specific intervention to prevent mobility disability.

In this large clinical study, researchers found that a regular, balanced, and moderate physical activity program followed for an average of 2.6 years reduced the risk of major disability by 18 percent in an elderly, vulnerable population.

Participants receiving the intervention were better able to maintain their ability to walk without assistance for 400 meters, or about a quarter of a mile, the primary measure of the study. Results of the large clinical trial, conducted by researchers at the University of Florida, Gainesville and Jacksonville, and colleagues at seven other clinics across the country, were published online on May 27 in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The researchers were supported by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health.

“We are gratified by these findings,” said Richard J. Hodes, M.D., director of the NIA, which was the primary sponsor of the trial. “They show that participating in a specific, balanced program of aerobic, resistance, and flexibility training activities can have substantial positive benefits for reducing risk of mobility disability. These are actionable results that can be applied today to make a difference for many frail older people and their families.”

The Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) trial included 1,635 sedentary men and women aged 70-89 at risk for disability who were randomly assigned to a program of structured, moderate-intensity physical activity or to a health education program focused on topics related to successful aging. The diverse participants were recruited from urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Led by Marco Pahor, M.D., of the University of Florida, the study was also conducted at field sites at Northwestern University in Chicago; Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Stanford University in Palo Alto, California; Tufts University in Boston; the University of Pittsburgh; Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Data management and analysis were coordinated by Wake Forest University. Participation in the study averaged 2.6 years. The physical activity group of 818 people gradually worked up to the goal of 150 minutes of weekly activity, including 30 minutes of brisk walking, 10 minutes of lower extremity strength training, 10 minutes of balance training, and large muscle flexibility exercises. Their programs took place at a clinic twice a week and at home three or four times a week. The 817 people in the comparison group participated in weekly health education workshops for the first 26 weeks, followed by monthly sessions thereafter. They also performed five to 10 minutes of upper body stretching and flexibility exercises in each session.

Participants in both groups were assessed every six months at clinic visits. Adherence to the program was measured by attendance at sessions and by questionnaires in which participants recorded the number of hours per week that they were physically active. In addition, participants’ activity was recorded for one week during each year of the trial through an accelerometer, a small belt device that measures physical activity.

“At the beginning of this trial, all the participants were at high risk for mobility disability,” said Evan Hadley, M.D., director of the NIA Division of Geriatrics and Clinical Genomics. “At the start, they were able to walk about a quarter of a mile without a cane, walker, or help of another person. But they did have sedentary lifestyles and low scores on some standard physical tests that measure risk for disability. The study shows it is never too late for exercise to have a positive effect for a significant portion of frail older people.”

Principal investigator Pahor noted that participants attended more sessions and stayed in the study longer than anticipated. He also noted that people in the intervention group were very enthusiastic about the exercise program. “When we finished the exercise program at our site, the people were so disappointed that the classes were over,” he said. “We know that many of them are continuing to exercise and we are so pleased that they have kept up with this.”

In 2011, NIA launched Go4Life, a national exercise and physical activity campaign, based on previously demonstrated benefits of exercise for healthy community-dwelling adults age 50 and older. The LIFE study adds to that evidence with findings that older people who can reap rewards from regular physical activity.

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Is Your Business Compliant with ERISA?

ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) was originally designed for the protection of individuals enrolled in pension plans. In fact, ERISA actually has a pretty interesting history. Back in the 60’s pension reform gained some momentum after the Studebaker Corporation (the automotive manufacturer) closed its plant and due to a poorly funded program, thousands of people were left with no pensions at all because it will include all of the required information all in one place. A good ERISA Wrap will gather things like the plan administrator’s name, how the plan is funded, eligibility requirements for employees, rules about PHF, and required notifications such as WHCRA enrollment, Newborn’s Acts, Michelle’s Law, information regarding COBRA administration, and much more.

To make sure this is done properly, the easiest thing to do is simply call your broker. This isn’t just one document and then you’re good to go—it’s an annual upkeep, and you’ll want to be sure you’re working with a partner versed in the arena to ensure this gets completed after each renewal period. As a service to our community, Montage can provide this ERISA Wrap to our non-client-friends in the business community for $450.

Information for this article was provided by Montage Insurance. For any questions about the service works or to schedule a conversation on your compliance, contact Montage directly at (818) 676-0044 and ask for Ed, Toby Margarita or Danone...all of whom are standing by to assist.

By LYEA CHU

In children, early onset scoliosis can progress and cause breathing problems, as well as cosmetic disfigurement.

To address the limitations of spinal bracing and fusion for treatment of severe scoliosis in young children, a distraction spinal implant called a “growing rod” was developed. Traditional growing rods are surgically implanted across the spinal curvature. Distraction, or lengthening, of the growing rods usually occurs every six months. These distraction sessions require the surgeon to surgically re-open the incision site and lengthen the growing rod, meaning invasive, repeated surgeries.

A New Option for Improved Quality of Life

A new FDA approved technology by California-based Ellipse Technologies called the MAGEC (Magnetic Expansion Control) system is now being used by some of the nation’s leading surgeons for children with spinal abnormalities. MAGEC provides a revolutionary alternative to an otherwise emotionally and physically painful treatment regimen.

The MAGEC System is composed of an implantable rod and an External Remote Controller (ERC). Following a surgical procedure to implant the rod, it can be non-invasively distracted in the physician’s clinic or office using the ERC. After the MAGEC rod has been implanted, the ERC is placed externally over the patient’s spine at the location of the magnet in the MAGEC rod. Periodic, non-invasive distraction of the rod is performed to lengthen the spine and to provide adequate bracing during growth.

In a nutshell, the implanted spinal rod is used to brace the spine during growth to minimize the progression of scoliosis. Magnetic components in both the MAGEC rod and ERC allow for distraction of the rod to be performed non-invasively and without the need for repeated surgeries as found in traditional growing rod systems.

Because this adjustable technology eliminates the need for repeated lengthening surgeries, it allows significant quality of life benefits for the patients and their families.

Lyea Chu is a freelance health writer.

Innovative New Technology Offers Hope to Children with Scoliosis

As the local healthcare leader, Antelope Valley Hospital:

- Provides care to more than 200,000 patients each year.
- Receives over 104,000 Emergency Department visits annually.
- Is the only Level II Trauma Center within 50 miles.
- Has 450 physicians on-staff.
- Serves as a major economic engine in the community with a workforce of 2,500 employees.
- Relies on the time and talent of 400 volunteers.
- Delivers more than 5,200 babies a year.
- Offers the area’s only Pediatrics Unit and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).
- Recently opened the Institute for Heart & Vascular Care, which offers advanced cardiovascular care in one location.
- Is an Advanced Primary Stroke Center and STEMI Receiving Center with the expertise and equipment required to treat severe strokes and heart attacks.
- Provides comprehensive cancer care in conjunction with community partners, including City of Hope.
Valley Community Healthcare Helps Bring the Affordable Care Act to the Valley

The hoped-for success of the Patient Reform and Affordable Care Act (ACA) was based on the nationwide expansion of the community health center system that aimed at providing a medical home for the millions of men and women newly eligible for health insurance. People frequently ask “Did the Affordable Care Act impact Valley Community Healthcare?” The answer is a resounding YES! If these newly insured individuals don’t have a doctor who will accept their Medi-Cal or Covered California insurance plans, they will continue to use local emergency rooms for non-urgent care. And this prompted Valley Community Healthcare to significantly expanded its array of services and provide these San Fernando Valley residents a Medical Home.

The ACA provisions that had the most impact on lower-income people and Valley Community Healthcare are the state-subsidized exchange of qualified health plans, and the expanded Medi-Cal coverage for adults. The new health insurance marketplace successfully launched in California in 2014, provides businesses with less than 50 employees and individuals with incomes up to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) access to affordable health care. More significantly, Medi-Cal became available to any adult who earns less than less than 138% of the FPL (family of four earning $32,449 annually). Previously this coverage was only available to adults if their children were enrolled in Medi-Cal. In addition, Medi-Cal itself expanded coverage of primary care to include dental care, and for the first time, behavioral health services.

This demonstrates how the ACA impacted the low-income community; but the real, and perhaps more significant impact, is its power as an economic engine. As a direct result of the ACA, 45 new positions were created at Valley Community Healthcare, and the staff base increased to over 200 employees. Among these new positions were medical practitioners and support staff, and the Enrollment Department increased from four to 16 staff members.

Valley Community Healthcare has been preparing for this expansion for several years. In 2010 it began an enormous ramp-up at the North Hollywood Center broadening the array of clinical services offered to include a prenatal program, comprehensive adolescent medicine, and integrated behavioral health services. In early 2015, VCH’s new, full-service 15,000 sq. ft. North Hills Wellness Center opened for limited services, and will continue to expand the range of services through 2015 and beyond.

The new site, adjacent to Monroe High School, will serve the attending students, their families, and the medically underserved residents of all ages in the surrounding communities. The Wellness Center provides easy access to one stop care, encouraging patients to visit their medical home rather than an emergency room or urgent care center. By providing residents with access to a full array of services, pediatrics, dental and optometry in one location, North Hills Wellness Center addresses transportation difficulties and other obstacles that frequently prevent patients from receiving ongoing care and treatment. Its proximity to the school (students can enter the Wellness Center through a private walkway directly from the campus, thus ensuring their safety and confidentiality) provides special opportunities for health programs that directly impact the students. Valley Community Healthcare’s award-winning Valley Teen Clinic is already on campus, providing special teen-focused education on pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections, as well as access to primary care.

In order to cover the cost of its extended operations Valley Community Healthcare conducted a successful expansion campaign, raising over $3.65M, which expanded the North Hollywood Center, equipped and furnished the new North Hills Center, and provided the operational funding necessary before the new site becomes fully functioning and sustainable.

Because of the 2014 implementation of the ACA, Valley Community Healthcare staff enrolled 5,000 new previously uninsured patients to Medi-Cal, and provided valuable assistance to people signing up for health coverage for the first time. “The shortage of primary care providers is growing, and insured patients still face significant barriers to care. Our health care systems in transition,” said Roger A Peeks, MD, Chief Medical Officer at VCH, “and so we are looking at introducing new models of patient care. These go beyond the one-on-one doctor/patient visit to include an integrated team approach to treatment, tele-medicine, and group visits.”

As a direct result of the Affordable Care Act, Valley Community Healthcare created a new medical home in the North San Fernando Valley, and thousands of its low-income residents have access to healthcare for the first time in their lives.

For more information about Valley Community Healthcare, visit valleycommunityhealthcare.org