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*THE TREATMENT OF METHAMPHETAMINE,  
USE, ABUSE, AND DEPENDENCE: Presented the  
NAMSDL's 2<sup>nd</sup> Methamphetamine Legislative and Policy  
Conference*

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## *Overview of Methamphetamine, abuse, use, and dependence*

- Methamphetamine is a powerful, addictive stimulant associated with serious anti-social and sexually aggressive behaviors.
- In the early stages of a person's addiction to methamphetamine, the user has frequent feelings of invincibility and sexual prowess

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## *Overview of Methamphetamine, Cont'd.*

- The methamphetamine user often stops existing friendships with nonusers, preferring instead the company of other methamphetamine users.
- Isolation, characterized by missed appointments, unreturned phone calls, and low initiation by the methamphetamine user intensifies.
- Fixation on the drug lessens the importance of personal relationships
- Obtaining, using and obsessing about the drug are clearly the priorities

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## *Characteristics of the methamphetamine user*

- Methamphetamine users experience paranoid delusions and typically isolate in their homes.
- They adopt different personas in response to constantly changing emotions.
  - Euphoria, irritability, isolation, anger and hostility occur in rapid succession
  - Multiple personalities appear to exist inside
  - Users become crafty and sly
  - They believe that they are capable of creative deceptions.
  - They believe that they are key players in grandiose schemes and grand plots.

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## *Characteristics of the methamphetamine user cont'd.*

- ❑ What is methamphetamine?
- ❑ Methamphetamine is a stimulant that dramatically affects the central nervous system
- ❑ As a result, methamphetamine users experience a range of health problems that include:
  - Memory loss
  - Aggression
  - Psychotic behavior
  - Potential heart and brain damage
  - Convulsions, permanent severe body damage or death have resulted from abuse
  - Use of Methamphetamine also contributes to increased transmission of hepatitis and HIV/AIDS.

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## *Characteristics of the methamphetamine user cont'd.*

- ❑ Methamphetamine, like nicotine, addicts very fast
  - Crystal methamphetamine, one form of methamphetamine, is one of the most addictive illicit drugs.
  - Long term effects include structural changes to the brain, memory loss, difficulty completing complex tasks and permanent psychotic symptoms.
  - Other symptoms include insomnia, confusion, anxiety, hypersexual, and violent behavior
  - Some psychotic features can exist including paranoia, auditory hallucinations, mood disturbances, and delusions
  - The paranoia can result in homicidal as well as suicidal thoughts

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## *Selected facts and statistics on impact of methamphetamine on the family*

- Impact on Criminal Justice System—Emphasis on Women
  - About 24 percent of women surveyed in 2000 in Maricopa County, AZ jails tested positive for methamphetamine, followed by roughly 32 percent in 2001. That jumped to 41 percent in 2002.
  - Of 500 law enforcement agencies in 45 States, 87% reported increases in methamphetamine related arrests in the last 3 years, and 62% reported increases in laboratory seizures.

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## *Selected facts and statistics on impact of methamphetamine on the family*

- In North Dakota about 20% of the child-protection referrals that come into family services involve methamphetamines in some way.
  - According to the State health department's Addictive and Mental Disorders Division, women make up 49 percent of the patients treated for a primary addiction to methamphetamine in fiscal year 2004. That's up almost 10 percent from two years ago

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## *Treating Methamphetamine Addiction*

- *At this time the most effective treatments for methamphetamine addiction are cognitive behavioral interventions*
- ***There are currently no particular pharmacological treatments for dependence on amphetamine or amphetamine-like drugs such as methamphetamine.***
  - The current pharmacological approach is borrowed from experience with treatment of cocaine dependence.
  - Unfortunately, this approach has not met with much success since no single agent has proven efficacious in controlled clinical studies. Antidepressant medications are helpful in combating the depressive symptoms frequently seen in methamphetamine users who recently have become abstinent.

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## *Emergency treatment*

- There are some established protocols that emergency room physicians use to treat individuals who have had a methamphetamine overdose. Because hyperthermia and convulsions are common and often fatal complications of such overdoses, emergency room treatment focuses on the immediate physical symptoms. Overdose patients are cooled off in ice baths, and anticonvulsant drugs may be administered also.
- Acute methamphetamine intoxication can often be handled by observation in a safe, quiet environment. In cases of extreme excitement or panic, treatment with anti-anxiety agents such as benzodiazepines has been helpful, and in cases of methamphetamine-induced psychoses, short-term use of narcoleptics has proven successful.

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## *Difficulty of treatment*

- Many treatment providers describe methamphetamine abusers as “the hardest to treat” of all drug users.
  - They are often overly excitable and “extremely resistant to any form of intervention once the acute effects of meth use have gone away.”
  - Meth addicts get over the acute effects of withdrawal fairly quickly. However, the “wall” period lasts 6-8 months for casual users and 2-3 years for regular users. (Some people never recover and remain unsatisfied with life due to permanent brain damage.) This is a period of prolonged abstinence during which the brain recovers from the changes resulting from meth use. During this period, recovering addicts feel depressed, fuzzyheaded,

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## *Difficulty of treatment, Cont'd.*

- Methamphetamine causes a variety of mental, physical, and social problems which may prompt entry into treatment.
  - Though not as expensive as heroin and cocaine, its cost might also produce financial problems for users and prompt them to seek help.
  - However, the most commonly reported reason why methamphetamine users enter treatment is trouble with the law. These legal problems include aggressive or bizarre behaviors which prompt others to call police. Other reasons for entry include mental or emotional problems and problems at work or at school.

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# *Consequences Of Methamphetamine Use*

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  - Though not as expensive as heroin and cocaine, its cost might also produce financial problems for users and prompt them to seek help.
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## *Does Methamphetamine Treatment Work?*

- **Treatment is a highly cost-effective alternative; it is about one-tenth of the cost to treat a person rather than putting him or her in jail. And if they are in jail, its an excellent behavior management tool.**