



Empowering individuals to lead healthier lives

## DUAL DIAGNOSIS

What do we mean when we say this person has a “dual diagnosis”? This term refers to a person with both a chemical abuse or dependency problem and a co-existing psychiatric disorder. According to ASAM (American Society of Addiction Medicine) criteria also known as the ASAM patient placement criteria, Dimension three directly addresses Emotional, Behavior, or Cognitive Conditions and Complications in all levels of treatment.

Coexisting disorders are often referred to as “double trouble” due to the complex clinical issues that need to be addressed simultaneously. In the past, some mental health professionals refused to treat alcoholics and addicts, seeing them as resistant to mental health approaches and unlikely to benefit from treatment. On the other hand, in the past chemical dependency counselors oftentimes down played the need to treat the whole person, thus not fully acknowledging the need for and benefit from psychiatric medication.

However, for some time both mental health and substance abuse counselors have used the term “dually diagnosed” to designate a clinical population experiencing two sets of problems. The term dual diagnosis also attempts to communicate to others that these clients have special needs and require specialized treatment approaches.

At Renz Center, we have a clinical team that offers many perspectives. We have clinicians who have first been trained in mental health and then later came the education and specialization in substance abuse counseling whereas, other counselors started in the substance abuse counseling field and then gained more mental health education, training and experience over the years. Due to our diversity with clinical trainings and perspectives it allows us to treat those who are dually diagnosed in an appropriate and helpful manner, addressing the complexities of both illnesses concurrently.

One of the advantages of receiving outpatient treatment at Renz Center is that we have several different groups available to meet client needs. One of our specialty groups is our MISA (Mental Illness and Substance Abuse) group. Years ago, a group of clients were given the task to name the group and they believed the most fitting is Integration Group. The dually diagnosed client has the opportunity to engage with peers in a group setting where they can feel safe speaking on feelings, medication issues, mental health challenges, etc., that other groups may not understand or accept.

Abstinence appears to be the necessary goal of treatment for the dually diagnosed client. It is extremely important to teach the disease model. The disease concept provides a nonjudgmental, easy-to-understand rationale for the need to abstain while the group setting reinforces education of the psychiatric disorder.

The goal for counselors working with the dually diagnosed client is to be helpful, nonjudgmental and provide boundaries so the client can learn to be responsible for realistic and healthy changes.