A historical perspective of alcoholism – from sin and crime to disease

Beatriz Lourenço¹, Mónica Marinho¹, João C. Fernandes¹, and Teresa Mota¹


Abstract

Introduction: Alcoholism concept, research and treatment underwent major changes in the previous century.

Objectives: The aim of this work is to review the historical evolution of this condition, its understanding and different concepts that are associated with it.

Methods: Review of selected literature on the subject.

Results: During the 19th century, the temperance and degeneration movements influenced the understanding of alcohol addiction, providing a theoretical platform for the implementation of alcohol prohibition the United States of America and also the compulsory sterilization of severe alcoholics during the Nazi Era. The conceptualization of alcoholics as patients with the right to medical treatment came out of the work of several researches such as E. Jellinek and self-organized groups as the Alcoholics Anonymous. It provided medical care and social support for these patients, but also raised the question about the influence of social constructs in the medicalization of deviants behaviors. Since the late 20th century, there has been a progressive understanding of the neurobiology of alcohol ingestion, dependence and withdrawal, as well as multiple attempts to describe subgroups of patients.

Discussion and Conclusions: The way that alcoholism is conceptualized through time reflects the influence of social and political movements and also the knowledge of the aetiopathology and the treatment options available at that time. Although there is still an open debate about ethic and stigma, the current valued research tries to integrate both neurobiological and psychosocial models, in order to provide tailored therapeutic projects to each individual.

Supplementary material: Complete presentation available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org

Citation: Lourenço et al. A historical perspective of alcoholism – from sin and crime to disease. IJCNMH 2015;2(Suppl. 1):P53

Published: 20 June 2015

Open Access Publication Available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org

© 2015 Lourenço et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.