



From The Executive Director by Kevin Rich



I hope everyone is enjoying a prosperous 2026! It is hard to believe that we are already in March since it seems like we just celebrated the New Year 2026. Spring is one of my favorite seasons, flowers blooming, trees coming back to life, gardens being planted and lawns coming back to life. If you are or know a pharmacist, student pharmacist, or pharmacy technician suffering from substance use disorder (SUD) or mental health issue alone or co-occurring with SUD, call OPHP for assistance now, since left alone the problem will not go away and will get progressively worse.

I challenge everyone during this spring season to be aware there are some that struggle during this time of the year either due to loneliness or mental health issues and I hope you are willing to reach out and offer support during this difficult time for those struggling, making a difference. If you are missing a loved one or someone close to you, please know that Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP) extends our heartfelt condolences.

Enterhealth a Dallas based treatment center has contributed an article in this issue **“Mind-Altering Matters: The Science of Substance Use & Brain Health”** Brain chemistry involves web of neurotransmitters and receptors that guide our every thought, emotion and action. If the balance is disrupted by substance use, it affects everything from cognitive functions to emotions and even physical health. This article highlights the methods of treatment for substance use disorder and impact on brain health. I hope everyone enjoys this article.

Enterhealth also contributed another article for this issue **“Coping with Uncertainty: Building Resilience in an Unpredictable World”**. This article highlights practical strategies for dealing with an uncertain world which by human

nature we don't do well. It emphasizes the importance a solid support system that OPHP provides in recovery. I hope you enjoy this article.

When a pharmacist, student pharmacist or pharmacy technician enters the OPHP program, and begins their road to personal recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD) and/or co-occurring issue often the family, friends or colleagues may not understand the vital role they may play in the OPHP participant's recovery. They may even verbalize that they knew something was wrong but couldn't identify it and were shocked to find that their loved one, friend or colleague suffered from a SUD or co-occurring issue. In this issue OPHP will include an article "Identifying the Problem" in hopes to help loved ones identify the issues in those suffering and what they can do to support their loved ones. Also, it is important for friends, family members or colleagues to get assistance since they also are impacted by this insidious disease.

OPHP has a free-standing website at www.ophp.us Please visit our website to learn more about the services OPHP provides the pharmacy profession regarding assistance with a personal substance use disorder and/or mental health issues. Contact OPHP if you have any questions or need assistance.

Don't forget, take time for self-care, and if you are struggling with SUD or other mental health issues, or you know another pharmacist or student pharmacist who you think maybe suffering call the (OPHP) Helpline immediately. There are those who struggle or have a hard time dealing with life on life's terms daily. Can I challenge everyone to recognize these struggles either in themselves or others and reach out for help or be willing to help if needed? If you find yourself struggling don't hesitate to reach out to (OPHP) for help that is readily available if needed. If you know someone struggling during this time, I hope you will be willing to be available for them if needed. If you are a pharmacist or student pharmacist and you are struggling personally with the substance use disorder or other mental health issues, I would encourage you to call OPHP today and self-report your issues now. The advantages of self-reporting your own issues of substance use disorder or mental health issues are that you can get well or get in recovery, and if there are no legal issues or complaint the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy does not get involved. This is a tremendous opportunity, so don't let it slip away if you are suffering from substance use disorder or other mental health issues call OPHP before it is too late, resulting in disciplinary action on your intern/pharmacy license or other legal consequences.

I encourage any pharmacist or student pharmacist that may be struggling with substance use disorder or any other mental health issue, or if you know a pharmacist or student pharmacist you think may be struggling, to call the OPHP Help Line now.



OPHP Helpline:
1-800-260-7574 (statewide)
405-557-5773 (local)

Mind-Altering Matters: The Science of Substance Use & Brain Health

Provided by Enterhealth

March is National Brain Injury Awareness Month, which is why we want to take the opportunity to explore the complex relationship between brain injuries, neurological disorders, and substance abuse. Recognizing the multifaceted interactions between all of these is pivotal for developing effective treatment strategies, preventive measures, and a deeper comprehension of both substance use disorders (SUDs), neurological conditions, and brain health in general.

How Substance Use Affects Brain Chemistry

At its core, human brain chemistry involves a web of neurotransmitters and receptors that guide our every thought, emotion, and action. When this balance is disrupted by substance use, it affects everything from cognitive functions to emotions, and even overall physical health.

This interplay isn't just a one-way street—pre-existing variations in brain chemistry can predispose individuals to substance use and related disorders, and traumatic brain injuries also have the potential to disturb the brain's balance and escalate the risk of substance use disorder.

Neurotransmitters and Their Roles

The brain communicates through a network of neurons that transmit signals using chemical messengers known as neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters regulate mood, behavior, and cognitive functions. Substance use can disrupt this communication system, leading to both short-term and long-term changes in brain function.

Dopamine and the reward system. Dopamine is often called the “feel-good” neurotransmitter because of its role in pleasure and motivation. Drugs like cocaine and methamphetamine cause a massive increase in dopamine, leading to the intense high and addictive properties of these substances.

Serotonin and mood regulation. Serotonin helps regulate mood, sleep, and appetite. Substances like MDMA (ecstasy) and certain hallucinogens can cause a flood of serotonin, resulting in mood lifts but also potential for mood disorders after prolonged use.

Continued on page

GABA and inhibition. GABA acts as a brake on neuron activity, inducing relaxation and reducing stress. Alcohol and benzodiazepines enhance GABA’s effect, leading to sedation but also increasing the risk of dependence.

Glutamate and excitation. Glutamate is involved in learning and memory and is the primary excitatory neurotransmitter. Substances that affect glutamate signaling, like PCP (phencyclidine), can cause cognitive impairment and psychosis.

Potential Long-Term Changes in Brain Chemistry

Chronic substance abuse can seriously alter the way the brain works, and it can even change its structure. This isn’t just a temporary hiccup—these are deep-rooted changes that aren’t easy to shake off, including things like:

- *Depletion of neurotransmitters.* When substances constantly disrupt the regulation of these messengers, the brain might stop making enough of them, leading to feelings like sadness, emptiness, or lack of joy in things we used to love.
- *Changes in receptor density.* Our brain cells have receptors where neurotransmitters send their messages, but over time, these spots can start disappearing or changing because of drug use. This can mess with how we feel pleasure, handle stress, or even make decisions.
- *Brain structure changes.* This is about the actual physical changes in the brain. Certain areas might shrink, or the connections between different parts of the brain might weaken. This can affect our ability to think clearly, control our impulses, or remember things.

All these changes can lead to serious problems with how we think and feel, long after someone has stopped using substances. It can make it tough to feel happy or think straight, and it’s why getting over substance use typically requires comprehensive treatment and lots of support.

Brain Injuries and Substance Use

March marks National Brain Injury Awareness Month, dedicated to raising public awareness about the impacts of traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and their intricate connection with substance use.

How Brain Injuries Can Initiate or Worsen Substance Abuse

Brain injuries, particularly traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), can profoundly alter an individual's life, often leading to physical pain, emotional turmoil, and cognitive disruptions. These challenges can sometimes push individuals toward substance use as a means of coping.

The relationship between TBIs, substance abuse and brain health is multifaceted, with substance use potentially initiating or exacerbating issues related to brain injuries in several ways:

Coping Mechanism for Pain and Emotional Distress

Individuals suffering from TBIs may experience significant physical pain, alongside emotional disturbances such as depression, anxiety, or PTSD. In an attempt to self-medicate these symptoms, some turn to substances like alcohol or prescription drugs.

Interference with the Recovery Process

Substance use after a TBI can significantly hinder the brain's healing process. Alcohol and certain drugs can alter brain chemistry and exacerbate brain inflammation, slowing down recovery. Additionally, substances can negate the effects of medications prescribed for recovery, leading to a prolonged rehabilitation phase and possibly worsening the overall prognosis.

Exacerbation of TBI Symptoms

Substances like alcohol and drugs can worsen TBI-related symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, and cognitive impairments.

Increased Risk of Further Injury

Substance use can impair judgment, reduce coordination, and slow reaction times, increasing the risk of falls or accidents that could result in additional TBIs. This risk is particularly high in individuals whose balance and motor skills have already been compromised by an initial brain injury.

Social and Behavioral Complications

Beyond the physical and cognitive implications, substance use following a TBI can lead to social isolation, strained relationships, and difficulties in maintaining employment. These social and behavioral complications can create a vicious cycle, where the individual feels increasingly isolated and turns even more to substances for solace, further exacerbating the issue.

The Cycle of Brain Injury and Substance Use Disorder

The relationship between brain injuries and substance use disorders forms a cycle that can impact our health, well-being, and overall quality of life. This cycle often begins when substance use increases the risk of experiencing a traumatic brain injury (TBI), due to impaired judgment, coordination, and reaction times. In turn, the presence of a TBI can heighten the likelihood of substance abuse as individuals may seek relief from their symptoms through drugs or alcohol.

Breaking the cycle between [brain injury and substance use disorder](#) requires targeted interventions that address both issues simultaneously. This includes medical treatment, psychological support, rehabilitation services, and social support systems designed to promote recovery and prevent relapse.

By understanding the complex relationship between TBIs and substance use disorders, healthcare providers, families, and communities can work together to support affected individuals, helping them to break the cycle and rebuild their lives.

Treatment and Management of Neurological Disorders Related to Substance Use

Addressing substance use disorders and neurological conditions, whether they occur independently or simultaneously, necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses neurological, biochemical, and behavioral aspects of addiction in treatment and management.

Common strategies and interventions include:

Detoxification and Withdrawal Management

The first step in treating substance use disorders is often detoxification, a medically supervised process to safely eliminate substances from the body. Withdrawal management includes medical and psychological support to help patients cope with withdrawal symptoms, which can range from mild to life-threatening.

Pharmacotherapy Options

Medications for addiction treatment: There are several FDA-approved medications for the treatment of alcohol, opioid, and nicotine dependence that can help to reduce cravings and normalize brain chemistry.

These include:

- Methadone and buprenorphine for opioid dependence
- Naltrexone for opioid and alcohol dependence
- Acamprosate and disulfiram for alcohol dependence

Medications for Managing Neurological Symptoms: Certain medications can be prescribed to alleviate specific neurological symptoms associated with substance use disorders, such as anticonvulsants for seizures or antidepressants for mood disorders.

Behavioral Therapies

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): CBT helps patients identify and change harmful behaviors and thought patterns related to substance use, and develop strategies to cope with cravings and avoid relapse.

Motivational Interviewing (MI): MI is a patient-centered counseling style that addresses patients' ambivalence about change and helps to increase their motivation to alter harmful behaviors.

Group Therapy and Support Networks: Peer support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) provide a community of individuals with similar experiences, offering social support and accountability.

I encourage any pharmacist or student pharmacist that may be struggling with substance use disorder or any other mental health issue, or if you know a pharmacist or student pharmacist you think may be struggling, to call the OPHP Help Line now.

Coping with Uncertainty: Building Resilience in an Unpredictable World

Provided by Enterhealth

Uncertainty is an unavoidable part of life, but lately, it feels more present than ever. The world is changing fast, and between global events, economic shifts, and personal challenges, it's no surprise that so many feel overwhelmed. When the future seems

unpredictable, our instinct is to seek control—but when that control isn't possible, stress and anxiety can take over.

The good news? While we can't eliminate uncertainty, we can learn to navigate it with resilience. By shifting focus to what's within our power, developing healthy coping mechanisms, and strengthening mental flexibility, we can regain a sense of stability—even in unpredictable times. This article explores practical strategies to help you manage stress, adapt to change, and move forward with confidence.

Why Uncertainty Feels So Overwhelming

The human brain is wired for predictability. Knowing what to expect helps us feel safe, make decisions with confidence, and navigate daily life with a sense of control. But when uncertainty enters the picture—whether it's related to work, health, relationships, or world events—it can trigger the brain's stress response.

Also known as the fight-or-flight response, this evolutionary mechanism was designed to help us survive immediate threats. However, when uncertainty is prolonged or open-ended, the brain struggles to resolve the tension, keeping us in a heightened state of stress. This can lead to anxiety, decision paralysis, and emotional exhaustion. Many people respond by compulsively seeking information—often leading to doomscrolling and mental fatigue—while others shut down emotionally, drained by the constant effort of trying to anticipate what's next.

Understanding why uncertainty affects us so deeply is the first step toward managing it. By recognizing that these reactions are normal but not always helpful, we can shift our focus from fearing uncertainty to developing strategies that help us tolerate and navigate it more effectively.

Practical Strategies for Coping with Uncertainty

While we can't eliminate uncertainty, we can change how we respond to it. By focusing on what's within our control, strengthening our mental flexibility, and building a solid support system, we can navigate unpredictability with more confidence and less stress.

Focus on What You Can Control

Uncertainty can make life feel chaotic but shifting your energy toward what is within your control can restore a sense of stability. Daily habits, routines, and intentional actions help anchor you in the present, reducing feelings of helplessness. Limiting exposure to stress-inducing news cycles—without disconnecting entirely—can also prevent information overload.

Establishing a “certainty anchor,” like a structured morning routine or mindful daily check-ins, provides a steady foundation even when external circumstances feel unstable.

Strengthen Mental & Emotional Flexibility

Resilience isn't about eliminating uncertainty—it's about adapting to it. Reframing uncertainty as a challenge rather than a threat can shift your mindset from fear to problem-solving.

Instead of catastrophizing worst-case scenarios, focus on developing solutions and alternative paths. Letting go of perfectionism is also key—resilience isn't about always getting things right, but about adjusting and moving forward when things don't go as planned.

Build a Personal Stress-Management Toolkit

Having reliable coping mechanisms makes uncertainty more manageable. Grounding techniques—such as the 5-4-3-2-1 method, deep breathing, or progressive muscle relaxation—help bring you back to the present moment. Physical activity provides an outlet for stress, while creative outlets like journaling or art can offer emotional relief. Therapy can also be a valuable tool for processing uncertainty in a healthy way.

During stressful times, some people turn to alcohol or drugs as a way to numb anxiety or regain a sense of control. While this might offer temporary relief, it often leads to greater problems in the long run, increasing the risk of dependence and worsening emotional distress. Developing healthier ways to manage uncertainty—like mindfulness, exercise, or professional support—can provide lasting relief without the harmful consequences.

Lean Into Social Support & Connection

Uncertainty feels far more overwhelming when faced alone. Checking in with trusted friends, family, or support groups can provide reassurance and perspective. Talking through concerns with others often makes them feel more manageable.

When uncertainty becomes too much to handle alone, seeking professional guidance—whether through functional psychiatry, therapy, or coaching—can offer the tools and support needed to navigate difficult times.

The Long Game: Building Resilience for an Uncertain Future

Uncertainty isn't going away—but our ability to handle it can improve. The key to long-term resilience isn't eliminating unpredictability; it's learning to navigate it with confidence. Accepting that uncertainty is a natural part of life can reduce its power over us, allowing us to respond with greater clarity and composure.

Building resilience starts with adaptability—the ability to adjust course when circumstances change. Cultivating optimism also plays a role, not by ignoring challenges, but by trusting in your ability to work through them. Over time, this mindset strengthens confidence in your own resourcefulness, making future uncertainties feel less daunting. Finally, resilience is about action. Instead of letting fear lead to paralysis, use difficult moments as catalysts for growth. Every challenge presents an opportunity to learn, adapt, and strengthen your ability to face the unknown. By shifting from fear to forward movement, you don't just cope with uncertainty—you thrive in spite of it.

I encourage any pharmacist or student pharmacist that may be struggling with substance use disorder or any other mental health issue, or if you know a pharmacist or student pharmacist you think may be struggling, to call the OPHP Help Line now.

OPHP Helpline:

1-800-260-7574 (statewide)

405-557-5773 (local)

All calls are confidential and OPHP is readily available for help.

I assure you it is the best thing you could do for a family member, friend, colleague or yourself. If there is no legal action, the pharmacist or student pharmacist can get the help and treatment they need for their disease and remain anonymous to the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy as long as they comply with the recovery recommendations of OPHP.

2026 AMERICAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION (APhA) INSTITUTE ON SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS SCHEDULED

APhA has set the dates for the annual APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorder (SUD) for May 27, 2026-May 30, 2026, at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT. I encourage any pharmacist, student pharmacist or pharmacy technician to attend this meeting. Substance Use Disorder is such a scourge and impacts so many more than just the individual consuming the chemical and this institute offers support to all those impacted, friends, colleagues and family members. This institute offers four (4) days of education on the impact of SUD and solutions through counseling, 12-step meetings including Alanon, etc.. I assure everyone that attends this institute will have their life changed in a positive way forever.

OPHP is currently in the selection process and is sponsoring four (4) student pharmacists from OU and four (4) student pharmacists from SWOSU based on an essay contest where the student pharmacists indicate why they are interested in attending this institute and what they plan to bring back to each of their perspective colleges of pharmacy in order to make a difference. Also, OPHP is sponsoring OPHP participants that want to attend as well as OPHP Board of Director members.

In an upcoming OPHP Newsletter in September 2026 watch for these student pharmacists and OPHP participants share their experiences at this institute often referred to as their "Utah Experience"

If you are interested in attending this life changing Institute you can visit the following link:

<https://aphainstitutepharmacist.com/>

**OPHP Helpline:
1-800-260-7574 (statewide)
405-557-5773 (local)**



All calls are confidential and OPHP is readily available for help.

I assure you it is the best thing you could do for a family member, friend, colleague or yourself. If there is no legal action, the pharmacist or student pharmacist can get the help and treatment they need for their disease and remain anonymous to the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy as long as they comply with the recovery recommendations of OPHP.

**OPHP Helpline:
1-800-260-7574 (statewide)
405-557-5773 (local)**

All calls are confidential and OPHP is readily available for help.

I assure you it is the best thing you could do for a family member, friend, colleague or yourself. If there is no legal action, the pharmacist or student pharmacist can get the help and treatment they need for their disease and remain anonymous to the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy as long as they comply with the recovery recommendations of OPHP.

All calls are confidential and OPHP is readily available for help.

I assure you it is the best thing you could do for a family member, friend, colleague or yourself. If there is no legal action, the pharmacist or student pharmacist can get the help and treatment they need for their disease and remain anonymous to the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy as long as they comply with the recovery recommendations of OPHP.

If you haven't already contributed to OPHP this year, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution. These contributions help OPHP continue to assist pharmacists/pharmacy students with the recovery process. To donate, please use the form below or click here to donate online. For those who have contributed this year, please accept our sincere thanks.
enjoy the newsletter.

WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT A COLLEAGUE HAS A PROBLEM WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Trust your instincts!!

**Call Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP) immediately
at the OPHP Help Line 1-800-260-7574 statewide or**

405-557-5773 locally

Do not confront alone

Left alone the problem will not go away.

If you or a pharmacist, student pharmacist, or pharmacy technician you care about is suffering from substance use disorder there is a solution.

Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP)
is readily available for help.

Call the OPHP Help Line 1-800-260-7574 statewide, 405-557-5773 locally.

All calls are confidential



Identifying the Problem

Substance Use Disorder is a cunning, baffling, miserable disease. Denial is a major factor involved stopping those with this disease from seeking help for themselves. So often concerned family members, friends and colleagues, express knowledge that a problem exists, but are unable to identify it. The following *Impaired Pharmacist Symptom Inventory* may help to identify the problem, and get them the help that is so readily available before it is too late.

Impaired Pharmacist Symptom Inventory

- Overwork**
- Disorganized schedule
- Spasmodic work pace**
- Unreasonable behavior
- Inaccessible to patients and employer
- Prescription errors**
- Patient complaints
- Frequent absences
- Decreasing workload and tolerance
- Frequent days off for vague reasons
- Taking sexual advantage of coworkers or customers
- Filling illegal prescriptions
- Taking and/or using drugs from pharmacy without follow-up by physician**
- Taking/selling drugs to others or giving them to family or friends
- Often late, absent or ill
- Decreasing work performance
- "Pharmacy Gossip"
- Incommunicative/unavailable
- Alcohol on breath while in pharmacy

**early signs

What do you do if you suspect a colleague has a problem with substance use disorder?

Trust your instincts!!

Call Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP)

immediately OPHP Helpline 800-260-7574

Do not confront alone

Left alone the problem will not go away.

If you or a pharmacist you care about is suffering from substance use disorder

There is a solution

Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP)

Is readily available for help

Call the OPHP Helpline 800-260-7574

All calls are confidential.