

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION
OF PROFESSIONALS TREATING PROBLEM
GAMBLING AND A STATEMENT OF WHO WE
ARE.**

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In 1984 Henry Leseur, in his groundbreaking text "The Chase" spoke of the need for research into pathological gambling. Leseur noted that social scientists would do well to examine what is currently happening in the clinical area. There is a need for clinicians, researchers, policy makers and prevention specialists to come together and share their knowledge and insight into pathological gambling. There is a need for a multidimensional approach towards understanding pathological gambling and as well a need to disseminate current information and techniques to those individuals who interact professionally with pathological gamblers. Whether we see pathological gambling as an addiction, an illness, a free choice or a moral weakness there is a real need to share the latest information and techniques with professionals in the gambling field.

With these thoughts in mind the Association of Professionals for Treatment of Problem Gambling (hereafter APTPG) was founded in 1998. The lack of any clinical organization dedicated exclusively to issues of pathological gambling sparked the formation of APTPG. It was originally formed by professionals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, New York professionals have since joined and have in fact created their own organization modeled on the APTPG.

The mission statement of the APTPG states that : "We are mental health and addiction professionals joined to advance the most effective means to identify and to treat problem and pathological gambling while providing a common voice for our colleagues." APTPG was created to fill a need among clinicians in the pathological gambling field. Such collegial organizations are essential for the ongoing development and improvement of knowledge base and skills. APTPG activities are directed towards answering the question, "What are the commonly accepted state of the art criteria and practices in the treatment

of pathological gambling?"

What are the benefits of belonging to the organization? Why do busy professionals dedicate one Saturday morning every other month to attend these meetings and share their insights and knowledge? We have gone to the horse's mouth and asked this question and the answers are enlightening.

There is a consensus that mental health professionals are largely ignorant about gambling. There is a belief that addiction counselors and social workers need to be educated and enlightened about pathological gambling. APTPG is seen as a vehicle to provide such education. APTPG members expressed a shared responsibility to disseminate information about gambling to other professionals who in fact deal with clients with gambling problems in their practice and may not be aware of the signs and dangers. APTPG members believe that a multidimensional treatment for a mentally ill or addicted individual needs to take into account possible gambling issues.

Insofar as the understanding of pathological gambling is in its infancy, light years behind the alcoholism field, professionals have limited contact with other professionals interested and concerned with gambling. The APTPG meetings provide a forum for support and networking. Professionals with this common interest can come together and share their knowledge and experiences. Roundtable discussions are held whereby a case is presented and discussion ensues. Fresh perspectives can be provided. A presentation is made at every meeting on a particular area related to pathological gambling, these will be detailed herein. A great deal of learning takes place, every member notes how attendance at meetings improves their own mastery in the field. Members of the association as well as outside professionals share

their expertise and everyone benefits.

APTPG creates a professional classroom environment. Political information is provided by professionals involved in the "public policy" of gambling, Ed Looney, Executive Director of the Council on Compulsive Gambling of New Jersey, Inc. (hereinafter CCGNJ) is a founding member. Clinicians share their successes and failures, providing new information and suggesting new approaches for working with pathological gamblers. As modern technology expands the availability and convenience of gambling there is an ever increasing need for information on treatment. Researchers share the latest papers and studies on pathological gambling and suggest ideas for future research. New ideas are exchanged, members of the legal profession shed light on legal consequences of gambling, whether as to sentencing, guilt or innocence or mitigating factors. Professionals connected with drug courts throw out questions so as to gain the information necessary to incorporate pathological gambling as part of assessment and treatment.

There is an excitement and energy to the APTPG meeting. Members are passionate about the field and are in the forefront of providing various services within the field. The meetings begin with a splendid breakfast and incorporate discussions about current events in the gambling field. Members appreciate being on the ground floor of something new and exciting. There is a shared belief that pathological gambling will become the addiction of the 21st century and that the need to develop skilled practitioners to deal with this growing population is imperative. The dissemination of information to professionals working with pathological gamblers is the mission statement of the association

As well meetings are a place to kick around ethical issues which will be arising more frequently in the future. Brought together within the

association are a conglomeration of many of the most knowledgeable and innovative professionals in the gambling field. A new resource has been created, a new forum for direction of questions and queries. The convenience and accessibility of one professional helping another is of great importance and is a source of joy and comfort for all members.

There have been in excess of 30 meetings of the APTPG. Each meeting has dedicated 60 minutes to a presentation on relevant aspects of the field. For purposes of ease of discussion in this paper we have broken these presentations down into five areas.

One area that has been explored is addiction in general and how it relates to pathological gambling. The late Anthony Melillo, CCGC and former Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Council on Compulsive Gambling presented an "Overview of Addictive Behavior." Al Wright CADC, CCGC, presented on "Cross Addictions and Common Denominators of Addiction." Pat Hanley MAE, LRC did a presentation on "Codependency." Tony Melillo offered a discussion of "Dual Diagnosis." Jeffrey Beck, JD, MA presented on "Gambling, Other Behaviors and Illness: A CO-Morbidity analysis."

These presentations were designed to put pathological gambling in its proper perspective within the addiction framework and field. It is important that both similarities and differences between gambling and other addictions be noted. Professionals need to be familiar with the interaction of pathological gambling with other mental and physical disorders. They need to understand the effect of pathological gambling on others and how enabling behavior takes places. Basic principles of addiction are applicable to pathological gambling and there is a need to understand how these interact with pathological gambling. All presentations made use of overheads, outside references and examples.

Many of the association members find the question and answer periods after and in fact throughout the presentations are very rewarding and scintillating. New perspectives are provided questions are raised, the immediate feedback is beneficial to all.

A second area that has been the focus of many presentations is the law and legal consequences connected to pathological gambling. Ramon Ortiz, Esq. and Jerry Boswell, Esq. Presented on "Legal Aspects of Gambling" (Treatment Counselor and Legal Counselor: The Relationship). Ramon Ortiz, JD, CDA. presented on "Treating the Chemically Dependent Criminal Offender." James Kerwick, Esq. gave a presentation on "Assisting the Compulsive Gambler in the Judicial System." Jerry Boswell, Esq. and Fred Hogan CSW presented on "Criminal Sentencing of the Gambler: Mitigating Factors."

This area proved very beneficial for all members of APTPG; it increased their understanding of the work necessary to help the pathological gambler. It provided great insight into legal ramifications relating to gambling. Gambling practitioners cannot live in a vacuum and need to be fully aware of legal consequences and issues as it is often vital to understand the need of a criminal attorney who is also assisting the client, this must be a cooperative relationship and not adversarial. The presentations of legal professionals provided a different and useful perspective on gambling issues for the APTPG members.

A third area of presentation centers on subgroups of gamblers. Ron Karpen, an employee of CCGNJ spoke on "Senior Gambling: A Growing National Concern." Terry Elman, another CCGNJ employee presented on "Teen Gambling: Awareness, Prevention and Treatment Issues." Ed Looney, Executive Director of CCGNJ and Dan Gaffney delivered a presentation on "Investing, Trading and Gambling: What is

the Difference? Signs and Symptoms of a Stock Market Gambler."

JoAnn Ciurlino, CCGC, CADC, presented on "Gambling:Female Specific Issues."

Research indicates that pathological gamblers are more a heterogeneous group than a homogenous group. Breaking down and examining gambling by age, gender, or type of gambling allows a better understanding of pathological gambling. Adolescents and seniors have different motivations for gambling, their gambling is caused by very different beliefs and roles. A solid understanding of subpopulations allows for better dealing with clients seen on a regular basis. It is not sufficient to speak about all gamblers in a generic sense, the breakdown by subpopulation thus is an effective tool for understanding the gambling phenomenon.

Another area that has been focused on by a number of presentations is the treatment of pathological gamblers. This has been explored theoretically, generally and with specific treatment models and approaches. Dr. Marty Tashman presented on "New Therapy Approaches to Old Problems" where he focused on Gestalt, Psychodrama, NLP, Thought Field therapy and Family therapy. Ed Looney presented on "Gamblers Anonymous and Treatment." Kevin O'Neil, former Deputy Director of CCGNJ presented on "Development of Websites to Address Problem Gambling." Dr. Martin Tashman presented on "Hypnosis As a Therapeutic Modality for Problem Gambling" and on "Going Beyond Logic and Reason for the Treatment of Addictions when Nothing Else Works: Meridian Therapy: A Nontraditional Approach." Dr. Tashman and Jeffrey Beck, MA,JD, presented on "Dealing with Resistant Clients and Their Addictions," looking at motivational interviewing and a stages of change approach towards

working with pathological gamblers and role playing a therapy sessions

Treatment alternatives and suggestions are clearly of great relevance to an association dedicated to treatment of the gambler. These presentations led to a great deal of back and forth discussion, every association member came away with new ideas and approaches for treatment. As new techniques and treatment variations appear in the gambling literature they are presented to the APTPG for discussion and consideration. State of the art knowledge of treatment for pathological gambling is considered a major benefit of membership in the association.

The fifth area of concentration for presentations has been personality and theory as to gambling behavior. This is a diverse area and the presentations have run the gamut. Al Wright, CADC, CCGC presented on "The Role of Spirituality in Addiction and Addiction Counseling," Harvey Fogel, B.Ph.D. ,CCGC presented on "Brain Chemistry and Gambling." Jeffery Beck, MA.,JD. gave a presentation on "The Sociology of Gambling." Ramon Ortiz, JD, CDA. Presented on "Identity Issues of the Gambler" and "Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy and Schema Therapy: 2 Models for Understanding Maladaptive Thinking, Feeling and Behaving".

These presentations have been very thought provoking and innovative. They have covered the biopsychosocial nature of pathological gambling. They have examined the pathological gambler in terms of thoughts, emotions, beliefs, associations, spirituality and genetics. This has provided for a well rounded discussion as to the multidimensional intricacies of the pathological gambler.

APTPG has its own website() and has worked closely in conjunction with the CCGNJ. The association presents an annual award to an individual who has exemplified the goals of the association through

counseling, teaching and disseminating information. There is a \$20 yearly membership fee. Mass mailings and printing of brochures for distribution at major gambling conferences have been used to spread the word of the association and to extend an open invitation to others professionals to join.

APTPG is an attempt to contribute to the collection and dissemination of relevant information on pathological gambling. It provides a forum whereby professionals with an interest and passion for working with pathological gamblers can come together in an informal atmosphere and share their insights and knowledge and expertise about this subject. The association is responding to the challenge set forth by Henry Leseiur by bringing together policy makers, clinicians, researchers and other professionals in order to educate themselves and other professionals as to the growing problem of pathological gambling.