Alcoholic Women Break Stigma

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Charlie and Brooke before rehab

Hollywood, Calif. (rushPRnews) 04/19/10 — Recovery Rate Higher at Women Only Rehabs Claims The Orchid Treatment Center

By Jeffrey Jolson-Colburn

April 19, 2010 --Mothers with alcohol and substance abuse issues have had a long tragic history, and the problem seems only to be more present than ever. Celebrity moms like Heather Locklear, Tatum O'Neal and Brooke Mueller Sheen, actor Charlie Sheen's wife, who was admitted in February 2010 for a reported drug and alcohol addiction after an especially fiery altercation with the sitcom star, who may be leaving "Two and a Half Men", have brought the story back onto front pages news around the world. Several studies have found that women become addicted to alcohol more easily that men – creating a "fast track" to addiction. In the U.S. alone, over 5 million women abuse alcohol every year.

Recently, in a story that shocked and outraged the country and made headlines around the world, on July 26, 2009 Diane Schuler drove her minivan the wrong way down a highway near Westchester, NY, just north of the city. After 90 miles, she crashed, killing eight including herself and four children aged two, five, seven, and nine. Police soon determined that she had the equivalent of ten alcoholic beverages in her system, along with traces of marijuana. A broken bottle of vodka was also found in the wreckage.

"In all the years I spent with Diane, I never saw her drunk!" said her husband,

Daniel Schuler, in a oft-repeated statement to the press. “She was the best mother and wife that anyone could have ever hoped for.”

According to a statement made in a press release, Julie Queler, CEO of The Orchid Recovery Center, an all-women drug and alcohol rehab center, “alcoholism is a hidden disease and women become quite skillful at hiding it from their closest partners.”

Despite the sometimes-sensational news headlines, addiction in women remains a deeply buried problem, stigmatized by society as unlady-like, resulting in a greater reluctance then men from women to seek help. Alcohol addiction in women often goes undiagnosed, unrecognized by their partners even.

According to a recent edition of the Harvard Mental Health Letter, women tend to progress more quickly from use to dependency and addiction, more quickly develop medical or social consequences from their addiction, and are more susceptible to relapse after a period of sobriety.

Women also enter into their addiction differently than men. Substance abuse and addiction in women is, most often, “brought about by an untreated or unresolved trauma, from an abusive relationship or rape, to even postpartum depression, compounding the difficulties to recognize and diagnose the disease,” according to Queler.

Just as a woman’s addiction differs, so too should her recovery treatment, according to experts.

Former First Lady Betty Ford, upon leaving the U.S. Naval Hospital in Long Beach where she completed a substance abuse treatment program, advocated for the need for gender-based addiction treatment. In 1982, the Betty Ford Center was founded.

But according to the Harvard Mental Health Letter, as recently as the early 1990s, the majority of addiction research focused primarily on men, and thus, so too did all traditional addiction treatments.

However, there is now a growing body of evidence that female addicts face challenges that male addicts simply don't, namely familial responsibilities, as well as the physiological differences that affect the biology of addiction.

Founded on groundbreaking research of Dr. Karen Dodge, director of research at Hanley Center, the Orchid Recovery Center, designed their alcohol addiction treatment program on the principle that women overcome their addictions faster and more effectively when amongst a community of fellow women addicts, and have embraced a holistic approach to treatment, including life skills, yoga, and meditation practice.

And so, although research has found that women are less likely to enter into a treatment program, the good new is that, according to the Harvard Mental Health Letter, they are just as likely to recover as men.

Scheduled for April 30, ABC News' 20/20 is set to air an in-depth report on alcoholism in women, a look at recovery, testimonials from patients and their families. The report airs Friday April 30th, 2010 at 10/9 central.

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