Show Me the Real Odds

THE HIDDEN ADDICTION: WHY GAMBLING SHOULD BE PART OF EVERY HEALTH SCREENING



THE PATIENT ISN'T COMING IN TO TALK ABOUT GAMBLING.

They're having trouble sleeping.

They're feeling more anxious than usual. Their headaches won't go away. They're under financial stress. Their relationship is falling apart. They seem distracted, overwhelmed, or depressed.

ON THE SURFACE, NONE OF THOSE CONCERNS POINT DIRECTLY TO GAMBLING.

That's what makes gambling disorder different.

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THE REAL ODDS

Unlike alcohol or many other substance use disorders, gambling often leaves no obvious physical signs. There is no smell, blood test, or visible symptom that immediately alerts a healthcare provider. As a result, **gambling-related concerns can remain hidden behind symptoms such as anxiety, depression, chronic stress, sleep disturbances, financial strain, relationship conflict, or difficulty managing daily responsibilities.**

Research also shows that gambling problems frequently occur alongside depression, anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), substance use disorders, and suicidal thoughts or behaviors. [1, 2]

Because gambling is rarely the reason a patient schedules an appointment, it may never come up unless someone asks.

A MISSED QUESTION IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Routine visits—especially in primary care can provide an important opportunity to identify gambling-related concerns before they escalate.

A brief conversation about gambling, alongside routine screening for depression, alcohol, tobacco, and substance use, can help uncover an underlying behavioral health concern that may be affecting a patient's physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, finances, and daily functioning.

Sometimes one thoughtful question is all it takes to open the door to earlier intervention and meaningful support.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

Have you spent money on sports betting, online gambling, or gambling-like features in video games during the past year?

Has gambling affected your finances, relationships, sleep, mood, or daily responsibilities?

REFERENCES

[1] American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., text rev.; DSM-5-TR).

[2] Potenza, M. N., Balodis, I. M., Derevensky, J., Grant, J. E., Petry, N. M., & Verdejo-García, A. (2019). Gambling disorder. Nature Reviews Disease Primers, 5(1), 51.



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