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Specialist addiction treatment for the rich and powerful

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For the rich and powerful, life can be as hard as it is comfortable. When addiction strikes, status is no comfort, and can make standard treatment options ineffective.



Addiction is an equal-opportunity disease that can strike anyone, without regard for wealth or social standing. Nobody is immune. However, percentage-wise, addiction affects people at the lowest and highest ends of the socioeconomic spectrum in significantly greater proportions than those in the middle-income bracket.

At its core, addiction is nearly always about self-medicating physical or emotional pain, pressure or stress. While the pain-points for wealthy individuals, senior executives and celebrities are different to those experienced by people without great stores of money, their suffering is real and just as debilitating.

Life isn't easy for those in positions of power and authority, who are by nature exposed to tremendous pressure to succeed. Stress is high, and time for life's simple pleasures is in short supply: celebrities, constantly in the critical public eye, are reduced to object status; high-level executives take the blame when businesses don't perform.

Such a pressure-cooker existence prompts many to self-medicate with alcohol or prescription drugs, while others resort to stimulants to maintain a high level of energy in an atmosphere of extreme competition. While the lives of ultra high-net-worth (UHNW) individuals, celebrities and top-level executives are different in many ways, they share common factors, all central to their very identity and which are important to consider when such individuals seek treatment.

Ultra isolation

Extreme wealth and power provides a buffer from many of life's difficulties, but it also creates an impenetrable wall that keeps people disengaged and isolated. Life is different for people who travel in private jets and escape to luxury yachts, or who travel first class from boardroom to boardroom. Living environments, by necessity, are closely guarded and maintain a high level of security. Concierge doctors and personal bankers make house calls. Life within this rarefied atmosphere is comfortable, but can also often be painfully lonely.

Typical rehab centres, even so-called 'luxury' rehab environments, seem modest and uncomfortable in comparison to opulent living environments of these individuals. Most rehab centres around the world have little understanding and empathy for the backgrounds of UHNW individuals, who tend to be ill at ease in group therapy and other group sessions. There is normally little time for one-on-one treatment in such institutions.

To expect such people to enter highly restrictive, abstinence-based, socioeconomically diverse programmes is unreasonable and can even be dangerous, ultimately driving affluent individuals further into the depths of isolation and destruction caused by their addiction problems.

Creeping suspicion

Like any other minority group, the extremely wealthy and powerful tend to be highly suspicious of those outside their group, which serves as a protective measure against potential threats. To make matters worse, today's global populist movement has created an atmosphere in which the affluent and those in power are treated with disdain, perceived as insensitive, self-absorbed people who spend their days doing nothing but basking in wealth and influence.

It's no surprise then that well-to-do people are often suspicious and mistrustful of people outside their immediate realm. This includes clinicians and other treatment professionals, making recovery from addiction problematic to say the least.

Standard rehab centres typically lack the specialised level of empathy required for UHNW individuals, and therapists don't give credence to the particular challenges facing the wealthy. Nobody enjoys discomfort, but, unlike most people, a moneyed person can call up a private jet and make a speedy exit if treatment becomes too uncomfortable. Sadly, an opportunity for healing is lost when the person flies away. What's more, sometimes there is no second chance.

Abundant wealth

'Affluenza' is a term used to describe children or teens who grow up in a culture of great wealth and privilege. There is no official diagnosis and the term is frequently bandied about by the press, especially when it is used to excuse antisocial or criminal behaviour.

It's easy to blame this phenomenon on simple over-indulgence on the part of well-to-do parents, but research in recent years suggests a unique set of circumstances can contribute to the dysfunctional behaviour of some children who grow up in extreme wealth. Children of prosperous parents often grow up in painful isolation, but, at the same time, the expectations put on privileged kids can be tremendous. Academic and social success is of primary importance and, as they grow up, wealthy kids may be restricted by family expectations surrounding nearly every aspect of life.

Specialist treatment

By its very nature, addiction treatment should be challenging and uncomfortable, but must first diminish the physical discomfort experienced by those who have made the difficult decision to address an addiction. Treatment must meet people where they are instead of attempting to press them into a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to reflect the reality of their very existence.

An effective treatment environment is ego-syntonic, or in tune with each person's identity. Only then is the time right for the clinician to present appropriate challenges that move the person to a point where recovery can begin.

Directing the person to an emotionally reparative experience is an art that requires the therapist to understand when to push and when to step back. Sadly, such intuition is rare and many clinicians simply demand participation in 12-step meetings and other stereotypical interventions that prove mostly ineffective with this unique segment.

An effective, well-grounded therapist understands the particular struggles endemic to people of extreme wealth and power. To be truly effective, clinicians must adopt a post-modern, feminist psychotherapeutic stance that fosters an authentic connection with each patient, creating an atmosphere of collaboration in which personal power and identity is recognised and appreciated.

Confidentiality first

Absolute and total confidentiality is a requirement for high-profile celebrities, upper-level executives, and UHNW individuals who are fearful their private lives may be the highlight of the evening news. For this population, exposure creates immeasurable costs and, sometimes, irreparable damage.

Most rehab centres, even luxury ones, have published addresses, numerous beds, and treatment modalities in which patients see one another every day. In such an environment, there is nothing to stop eager paparazzi and other gossipmongers.

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Many wealthy people are justifiably suspicious and fearful of extortion or blackmail if news of a family member's addiction becomes public knowledge. This means many end up unwilling to enter treatment without an absolute assurance of 100 percent anonymity.

Simple solution

At Paracelsus Recovery, absolute confidentiality is of utmost importance. Group settings are avoided altogether by treating one patient at a time in a luxurious private residence. Addresses of clinical residences are never published. Instead, a dedicated team of empathetic professionals with particular experience working with this clientele will work one-on-one with each patient.

Each residence surpasses the finest five-star hotel. A butler, chef and housekeeper ensure the comfort of each patient throughout their stay. Unlike typical programmes that are tightly structured and inflexible, treatment is tailored to each client's needs and responsibilities, allowing for career demands, work, or public appearances. This gives each client the shot at recovery they deserve, in an environment that suits their unique situation and needs.