

# Tracking a Silent Epidemic

by Matt Robinson

## “Addiction is a silent epidemic.” So says Dr. Punyamurtula S. Kishore, founder and director of the National Library of Addictions.

Since so many addicts feel ashamed of their situation or are simply incapable of asking for help, the problem of addiction flies under the radar of many communities in which it exists. “Communities have blind spots for certain aspects of society,” Kishore advises, noting that this is especially the case in more affluent communities such as Brookline. “People are afraid that if they admit to these problems being present in their communities, it will drive property values down, so they say that ‘It doesn’t exist here,’ or they simply put their heads in the sand and ignore the problem.”

### Part of Our Culture

Another difficult aspect of dealing with addictions (at least in America) is that national policy and opinion have varied so widely throughout the nation’s history. “In Saudi Arabia,” Kishore says, “if you are caught drinking, you lose a hand. Here, alcohol is seen as part of our social culture and our social mythology. It is seen as a social lubricant and may even be seen as medicinal.” And yet, Kishore counters, other drugs are criminalized. “Apparently, we have a blind spot to some aspects of use and abuse,” Kishore notes. “And what makes it worse is that this blind spot has changed.” By way of example, Kishore offers the case of marijuana, which was once a highly popular and socially accepted drug, yet now is outlawed. “It is hard to know what to say to our kids,” Kishore admits. “It is hard to tell them what not to do if we did these things ourselves. The question, therefore, is where do our boundaries exist?”

As one of the foremost experts on addiction, Kishore knows a thing or two about boundaries. “Even so,” he admits, “it is difficult to say what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘addiction.’” Further complicating matters, Kishore observes, is the fact that what makes sense for society may not make sense for the individual. “Also,” he adds, “no two communities are alike, and we need to respect that.” Similarly, what makes sense for the doctor may not make sense for the patient.

### A Problem Difficult to Recognize

“Another problem is that many addicts are hard to see,” Kishore explains. “Many of them are highly functioning and they ‘need’ drugs to maintain.” One example Kishore cites is former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. “In lots of countries, alcoholism is not considered a disease,” Kishore observes. “It is more of a phenomenology. It is not aberrant. It is simply seen as a way to relax or socialize. As a

result, it is not as vilified. And that is where the problem arises, since people do not get help until it is very late. Such was the issue with President Yeltsin.” For people great and small, however, the issues are largely the same. “When people are drinking, they can function, except they may not be what others consider rational,” Dr. Kishore says. “Once they sober up, it makes for an inconsistency in their decision making. It can be erratic or even mysterious, and that is why it may be difficult to determine who is an addict.”

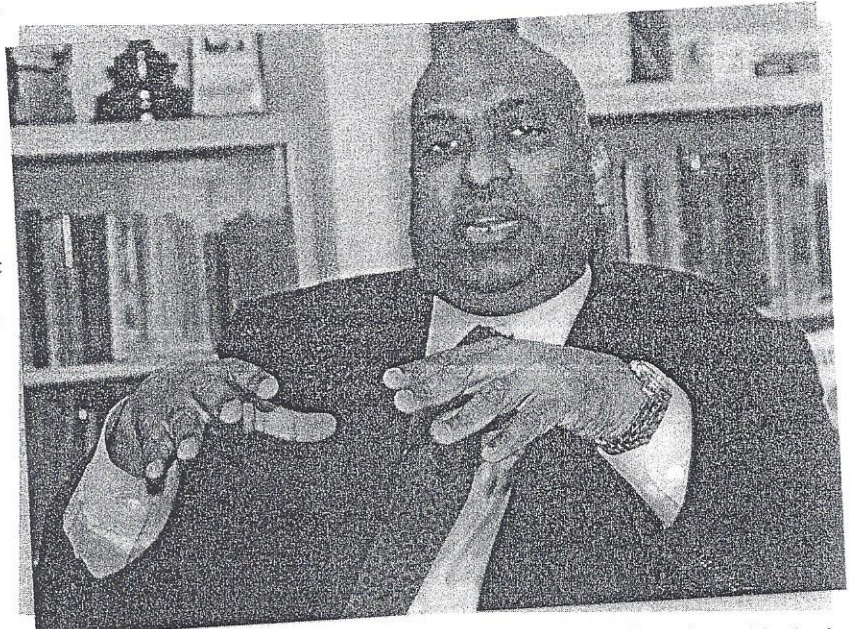
### The National Library of Addictions

11 Pierce Street, Brookline  
877-782-5800  
[www.nationallibraryofaddictions.org](http://www.nationallibraryofaddictions.org)

### A Young Person’s Disease

Yet another aspect of addiction that makes it so diabolical and difficult to deal with is the fact that so many addicts start so young and simply transition from one drug of choice to another. “Addiction is now a young person’s disease,” Kishore notes. “The peak of the

*Continued on page 13*



*Dr. P.S. Kishore, addictionologist and founder of the National Library of Addictions in Brookline.  
Photo by John Sidlo.*

This is the second in a four-part series about addiction and its treatment. The series highlights the work of Dr. P.S. Kishore, addictionologist and founder of the National Library of Addictions in Brookline. Subsequent installments will appear quarterly in Our Town Brookline.

new addict bell curve used to come much later - between the ages of 40 and 65. Now, the median age has come down dramatically." In fact, Kishore says, he regularly sees clients as young as eight years old! "Kids know too much too soon," he says. "We used to talk to freshmen in high school. Now we go much younger." As many younger people are still "tied to their parents' apron strings," Kishore explains that it is up to the parents to educate them and guide them in terms of safe and healthy habits. "Unfortunately," he says, "it is hard for a parent to tell their kids to avoid something they did or do themselves. And a lot of parents are simply in denial, or they think that, 'We did it and we're ok,' so why not let the kids do it?"

### Uncovering the Root Cause

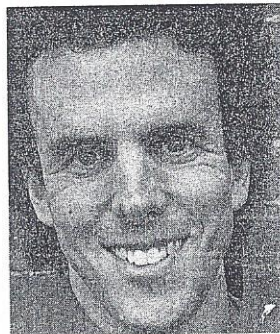
Not only are addictions progressive and parentally influenced, they are also self-perpetuating. "One drug leads to another," Kishore says, "and the more drugs someone takes, the less well they function and the more they feel they need to take." Even for those who are able to break the cycle, Kishore says they are far from "cured." "Life is full of pain," he observes, "so people are always at risk of becoming re-addicted." The key, therefore, Kishore says, is to break through the pain and get to the root cause. "We need to admit to it," he stresses. "We need to get the word out and get on the same neutral, pragmatic page. We need to invest the time to understand the individual and the factors they are facing, and to craft appropriate treatment. It will be tough, but it must be done."

### Tell-tale Signs of Addiction

- Pinhead-sized pupils
- Weight loss
- Attitude change
- Smoking a lot
- Loss of sleep
- Staying out all night
- Avoiding parents
- Itching and scratching a lot
- Nodding off
- Loss of appetite
- Sniffles/runny nose
- Cut straws, pens, or rolled-up dollar bills
- Charred spoons
- Mood swings
- Needle marks on veins
- Money issues/always broke
- Thing disappearing/being stolen
- Wearing/owning expensive items

### Recommended Reading

- The Selfish Brain: Learning from Addiction by Robert L. DuPont
- Staying Sober: Tips for Working a Twelve Step Program of Recovery by Meredith Gould
- Good Bye Hangovers, Hello Life by Jean Kirkpatrick
- The 12 Tiger Steps Out of Nicotine Addiction: A Step Study Guide for Nicotine Addiction Recovery by Paul Lagergren
- Out of the Shadows by Patrick Carnes
- Recovery Options: The Complete Guide by Joseph Volpicelli and Maia Szalavitz



*Matt Robinson is a freelance journalist from Brookline who also teaches boxing at BHS. He can be reached at matthewsrobinson@earthlink.net.*

## DECORATE YOUR CAKE—AND EAT IT, TOO!

- Take a course in **Cake Decorating** at Newbury College. Then, dazzle your family and friends with your new skills. Oprah magazine recognized our course as "one that gets you thinking."
- Our next seven-week Saturday class begins on **September 10.**

Sign up today by calling (617) 730-7042!

Newbury also offers bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates in programs like Culinary Arts, Conference Planning, Business Management, Accounting, Criminal Justice, and Hotel Management in a part-time, evening and weekend format.

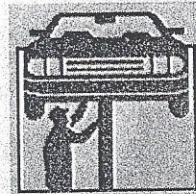
Call 1-800-NEWBURY to learn more, to visit us, and to register!

www.newbury.edu

*When You're Ready, We're Ready*

**Newbury**  
COLLEGE

## MICHAEL J. HYNES AUTO REPAIR



AUTOBODY & PAINT

**Collision Specialists**  
Referred by your insurance company with direct billing  
All makes & models  
Full service department  
Family owned since 1959  
14 Sheafe Street  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467  
Tel: 617.731.9994  
Fax: 617.731.6873

## One Stop Solution



- Packaging and shipping services
- Mailbox services
- Document services
- Moving & packaging supplies



MAIL BOXES ETC.®

**10% OFF**

UPS® or FedEx® Shipping!  
MAIL BOXES ETC.®

258 Harvard Street, Coolidge Corner, Brookline, MA 02446  
MBE Centers are independently owned and operated by licensed franchisees of Mail Boxes Etc., in the USA, and by its master licenses or their franchisees outside of the USA. Services and hours of operation may vary by location. Valid at participating locations. © 2003 Mail Boxes, Etc., Inc.