

MEANING OF DETOXIFICATION IN A HOSPITAL SETTING FOR ALCOHOL-DEPENDENT PEOPLE: RESUMING LIFE*

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ABSTRACT: Objective: To understand the meaning of detoxification for alcohol-dependent people in a hospital setting. **Method:** Qualitative study based on the Grounded Theory methodology. The theoretical sample consisted of 22 participants, including alcohol users admitted to a psychiatric clinic in the southern region of the state of Santa Catarina, health professionals from the institution and family members of users under treatment at the clinic. Data was collected in the second half of 2015 through interviews and analyzed using initial and focused codes. **Results:** The identified phenomenon is called "Resuming life after alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting". **Conclusion:** Detoxification in a hospital setting provides an opportunity for alcohol-dependent people to resume their lives and reintegrate themselves into society in a productive way.

KEYWORDS: Alcoholism; Mental Health; Nursing Care; Qualitative Study; Rehabilitation.

SIGNIFICADO DO SIGNIFICADO DO TRATAMENTO HOSPITALAR DE DESINTOXICAÇÃO PARA PESSOAS COM ALCOOLISMO: RETOMANDO A VIDA*

RESUMO: Objetivo: compreender o significado do tratamento hospitalar de desintoxicação para pessoas com alcoolismo. **Método:** pesquisa qualitativa, com a Teoria Fundamentada nos Dados como referencial metodológico. A amostragem teórica foi composta por 22 participantes, incluindo usuários de álcool internados em uma clínica psiquiátrica do Sul de Santa Catarina, profissionais de saúde da instituição e familiares de usuários em tratamento. Os dados foram coletados no segundo semestre de 2015, por meio de entrevistas, e analisados mediante codificação inicial e focalizada. **Resultados:** o fenômeno obtido intitula-se "Retomando a vida após tratamento hospitalar de desintoxicação", que é sustentado pelas categorias: Iniciando o vício pelo álcool; Perdendo o controle sobre o vício do álcool; Buscando o tratamento hospitalar de desintoxicação; Percebendo os benefícios do tratamento; e, preparando-se para a alta hospitalar. **Conclusão:** o tratamento hospitalar de desintoxicação representa uma oportunidade das pessoas com alcoolismo retomarem as suas vidas e reinserirem-se na sociedade de modo produtivo.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Alcoolismo; Saúde Mental; Cuidados de Enfermagem; Pesquisa Qualitativa; Reabilitação.

SIGNIFICADO DEL TRATAMIENTO HOSPITALARIO DE DESINTOXICACIÓN PARA PERSONAS CON ALCOHOLISMO: RETOMANDO LA VIDA

RESUMEN: Objetivo: comprender el significado del tratamiento hospitalario de desintoxicación para personas con alcoholismo. **Método:** investigación cualitativa, por medio de la Teoría Fundamentada en los Datos como referencial metodológico. Veintidós personas participaron de la muestra teórica, incluyéndose usuarios de alcohol internados en una clínica psiquiátrica del Sur de Santa Catarina, profesionales de salud de la institución y familiares de usuarios en tratamiento. Se recogieron los datos en segundo semestre de 2015, por medio de entrevistas, y se los analizaron por codificación inicial y focalizada. **Resultados:** el fenómeno obtenido se titula "Retomando la vida después del tratamiento hospitalario de desintoxicación", y está basado en las categorías: Iniciando la adicción por el alcohol; Perdiendo el control sobre la adicción al alcohol; Buscando el tratamiento hospitalario de desintoxicación; Percibiendo los beneficios del tratamiento; y, Preparándose para el alta hospitalario. **Conclusión:** el tratamiento hospitalario de desintoxicación representa una oportunidad para las personas con alcoholismo de retomar sus vidas y de volver a la sociedad de modo productivo.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Alcoholismo; Salud Mental; Cuidados de Enfermería; Investigación cualitativa; Rehabilitación.

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● INTRODUCTION

Drinking alcohol is part of our culture, and people usually drink for many reasons: feel happy, overcome fears and shyness, celebrate important occasions, relieve stress and/or physical pain, etc. However, when the use of this substance becomes repetitive and leads to loss of self-control, impacting the individuals' social, family and professional lives, as well as their physical and mental health, such habit is characterized as a chemical dependency.⁽¹⁻²⁾

Alcohol abuse is more dangerous for young people than for adults. Young alcohol-dependent individuals usually expose themselves to major risks, causing significant damage to their development, and later to other people. The excessive consumption of alcohol and other substances is related to several factors that directly and indirectly influence the quality of life of these young individuals, with emphasis on individual, micro and macro social factors. Therefore, actions aimed at ensuring adequate personal development and a good level of information should be implemented to prevent future physical, mental and social damage.^(3,4)

Each year, roughly two billion people in the world consume alcohol, which is approximately 40% of the current world population aged 15 years or older. Thus, alcohol consumption is one of the most important risk factors for morbidity, mortality and disability worldwide. Estimates indicate that around 3.3 million people die each year due to excessive drinking in the world, that is, almost 6% of the deaths are totally or partially due to alcohol use. Alcohol-related death rates are higher for young adults (aged 20-49 years), with great impact on the economically active population.⁽⁵⁾

According to estimates, the total annual consumption of alcohol per person aged 15 years or older in Brazil is 8.7 liters, which is higher than the world average of 6.2 liters. Risky single occasion drinking (RSOD), i.e. drinking 60 or more grams of pure alcohol per occasion at least monthly is very high in Brazil compared to other countries. It is estimated that abusive alcohol consumption reaches 16.5% of the Brazilian population aged 18 or older. The main diseases or damages associated with alcohol are interpersonal violence, liver cirrhosis, esophageal cancer, fetal alcohol syndrome and pancreatitis. Thus, the consequences of alcohol use directly and indirectly affect society, increasing the costs of health services and the social security system. Alcohol is also associated with high rates of absenteeism and decreased productivity at work.⁽⁵⁾

Due to the magnitude of the problem of abusive consumption of alcoholic beverages, since 2003, the Brazilian Ministry of Health has developed actions and policies to prevent, treat and rehabilitate users through the Program of Integral Care for Users of Alcohol and Other Drugs. In addition, several advertising campaigns were focused on the prevention and reduction of the use of alcoholic beverages.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, in health services, alcohol dependence should be approached in health services not only from a psychiatric or medical point of view but, above all, considering its social, psychological, economic and political implications, i.e. the multiple factors related to chemical dependency.^(1, 6)

One possible treatment for alcohol-dependent users is hospitalization. This treatment involves a short period of hospitalization until the user reaches clinical stability. After hospital discharge, the health professionals attempt to refer these users to the Psychosocial Care Network (CAPS) services.⁽⁵⁾ This is a delicate moment experienced by chemical dependents because they have to spend some time far from their families and friends. At that time, the bonds established with the health team can contribute to the success of the treatment, both during the detoxification process and after discharge.⁽⁶⁾

Thus, given the high incidence of alcohol use in Brazil and the scarcity of studies on the role of nursing in the management of alcohol-dependent people,^(1,7) and particularly because of the clinical and social relevance of the issue, the present study was based on the following research question: What is the meaning of detoxification in a hospital setting for alcohol-dependent people?

The present study aimed to gain insight on the meaning of detoxification in a hospital setting for alcohol-dependent people.

● METHOD

This is a qualitative study that used a constructivist grounded theory approach.⁽⁸⁾

The study site was a psychiatric hospital with 25 beds located in the southern region of the state of Santa Catarina with approximately 20 thousand inhabitants. The health team of the institution includes a nurse, five nursing technicians, a general practitioner, a psychiatrist, a nutritionist, a social worker, a psychologist and a pharmacist.

The theoretical sampling was obtained from three sampling groups (GA), resulting in a total number of 22 participants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1– Theoretical sampling. Orleans, SC, Brazil, 2015

	Sampling groups	Objectives
GA1	10 alcohol users admitted to the rehabilitation clinic (P1-P10)	To understand the development of addiction to alcohol and the meaning of detoxification in a hospital setting.
GA2	05 alcohol users admitted to the clinic between 20 and 30 days (P11-P15)	To check whether the users' views after the completion of detoxification differs from their views at the beginning of hospitalization.
GA3	07 participants, of which 04 were health professionals (02 nursing technicians, 01 psychologist, 01 social worker) and 03 relatives of patients admitted to the institution (P16-P22)	To explore the importance of professional and family support for treatment, as well as the relationship of health professionals and family members with the users.

The composition of the sample groups and the size of the theoretical sampling were determined by the theoretical saturation of the data.⁽⁸⁾ Data was collected between August and November 2015, through intensive interviews composed of open-ended questions.⁽⁸⁾

The interviews (in average 25 minutes long) were recorded, and were transcribed in full. The questions answered by users concerned the onset of alcohol-dependence, family history of alcohol consumption, meanings and expectations with the treatment, difficulties during alcohol detoxification and the family's role in detoxification. The questions answered by the second sampling group were similar to those of the first group, but were focused on the final phase of the detoxification treatment program. The health professionals and family members were asked about their participation in alcohol detoxification in the hospital setting of alcohol-dependent people.

Data analysis was performed using NVIVO® software in two steps: initial and focused codes.⁽⁸⁾ The initial code consisted of analyzing the data fragments, identifying incidents and transforming them into codes. In the focused code, the most significant and/or more frequent previous codes were grouped until a central phenomenon or category was generated, supported by categories and subcategories.⁽⁸⁾ The categories and phenomena obtained were validated by a group of experts in the field of mental health and/or in the Grounded Theory methodology.

The participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form and the study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution under protocol no 1.165.995. The statements were identified with codes formed by letter "P" followed by numbers according to the order of the interviews: P1, P2.... P22.

● RESULTS

The five categories that emerged from the data analysis are presented in Table 2. From the interconnection of the categories, the phenomenon “Resuming life after alcohol detoxification in the hospital setting” was obtained from the interconnection of the categories. The five categories are described below.

Table 2 – Categories and phenomenon. Orleans, SC, Brazil, 2015

Categories	Phenomenon
1. Onset of alcohol dependence	Resuming life after alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting
2. Loss of control of drinking	
3. Seeking alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting	
4. Realizing the benefits of the treatment	
5. Preparing for discharge	

Onset of alcohol dependence

Most users began drinking during adolescence during their leisure time and were introduced to this behavior by friends. Also, individuals with a family history of alcohol abuse (parental drinking) were more likely to engage in binge drinking. Heavy drinking was also triggered by traumatic experiences such as the death of a relative, unemployment and breakup of romantic relationships.

I started drinking when I was young, just for fun, because I was a teenager and used to go to parties with my friends [...]. (P1)

My father was alcohol-dependent, and I was influenced by him. [...] I was still a child when he woke me up and asked me to drink with him [...]. (P1)

It all started after the death of my son, that's when I began drinking every day. (P8)

Loss of control over drinking

High-frequency heavy drinking led to loss of control over the consumption of alcohol, resulting in dependence. These users were not aware of their chemical dependency and always tried to justify such habits, e.g. explaining that they used to drink in their leisure time or to overcome shyness and loneliness, etc.

I used to leave my house in the morning (always making an excuse for leaving) to go to the bar, and sometimes returned home at 2 o'clock in the afternoon [...] I was always making excuses to go out and stop by the bars to drink. (P9)

I used to drink to overcome my shyness with girls. Drinking made me feel confident to approach them (P6)

Thus, the development of alcohol has been progressive. Some users reported having control over their addiction through medical treatment and even spent some periods without drinking. However, relapses were frequent and led again to heavy drinking.

I underwent an alcohol abuse treatment program that resulted in a 3-year period of alcohol abstinence, but I experienced a relapse and started drinking again. Later, after a private appointment with a doctor I became abstinent for six months, but began to drink again. (P9)

At first, I drank, but that did not cause me problems, it was not compulsive at all, but over time I've been drinking more and more and lost control over it. (P1)

Over time, addiction to alcohol impacted the professional performance of users and generated family conflicts. Due to these negative repercussions, addiction to alcohol is now considered a disease that needs to be treated.

I have worked in several places, such as mechanical workshops, but I could never stay in any job because of my addiction to alcohol. (P2)

Alcohol caused me a lot of damage. I had many fights and problems with my family associated with drinking, because it is known that alcohol affects our moods. (P7)

Alcoholism is a disease, [...] we start drinking and lose control over this habit and often end up drinking more and more (P18)

Seeking alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting

This category describes the moment alcohol-dependent individuals realize they need help and begin hospital-based treatment for detoxification. People with alcohol dependence seek hospitalization not only to get professional help, but also to move away from society and hence from alcohol. At this stage, the support and encouragement of friends and family in the beginning of treatment was very important.

I needed to stay alone for a while, without the influence of the environment, of my natural habitat. I needed to stay away to think. (P10)

I had support from my friends [...] a lot of people helped me. Even the owner of the bar I used to go to was friendly and came to visit me here (P15).

I love my whole family, they always cared about me and did whatever they could to help me[...] the whole family is supporting me, and I'm very happy (P15).

The initial stage of alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting is critical. However, it is also the most difficult time for users due to the organic, physical and psychological alterations caused by alcohol withdrawal. At that point, some people even wonder if they really need treatment.

beginning was difficult! We have to go through alcohol detox, but many patients have panick attacks. (P14)

I don't know if I need help, maybe it takes only a little effort to quit alcohol. We must have firm resolve and persistency. (P2)

Realizing the benefits of the treatment

During the hospital-based alcohol detoxification program, users began to feel confident and more committed to their recovery. The good relationship with the other patients was considered a positive factor for this recovery, as well as the regulations and routines established by the institution.

I'm much better and feel confident that after my discharge I'll be ready to face the world outside [...] every day I have a new experience, I will stay here until the end of the treatment to avoid a relapse. (P14)

[...] we have to observe several rules and schedules that many of us, heavy drinkers, did not observe. For example, having lunch, starting and finishing work at the scheduled times, [...] is an important part of the treatment. (P7)

I know that I am better, I was very anxious and nervous in the beginning, but this has improved a little [...]. We do small services that help us adapt to the environment and forget that we are under treatment [...], this improved my self-esteem (P13)

Preparing for hospital discharge

After the detoxification process in the hospital, alcohol-dependent people must resume their lives and deal with everyday situations that may favor relapses. Users experience various feelings and have many questions at the time of hospital discharge. Many are confident after discharge and believe in the success of the treatment. However, fear and anxiety are also present. While hospitalized, patients do not have access to alcohol. However, when they return to social life, they will need strategies to deal with addiction and avoid relapses.

I want to get better... after discharge, I will avoid going to bars and other similar places, I will complete the 30-day treatment program and then go back home. (P2)

It's a long treatment and I'll have to adapt to my daily routine after discharge, because the reality outside is very different from what I have experienced in the hospital. [...] I hope to change and not disappoint my daughters anymore. (P13)

I'm afraid of life outside. It is fine in here, and I'm not afraid. The problems are outside. (P4)

After discharge, the users are aware that THE maintenance of treatment is as important as the detoxification process. Therefore, they stressed that they will attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and the Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS). One professional mentioned that the lack of a network that provides integrated healthcare services is a factor that complicates the delivery of permanent services to users. After leaving the hospital environment, alcohol-dependent users no longer contact the health services, which makes it difficult for them to pursue the treatment.

Hospitalization had a great impact on me, and as soon as I complete the treatment program I'll attend AA and CAPS... and I want to work in my field. [...]. (P12)

Access to proper outpatient treatment is difficult after discharge, since psychosocial care networks are not yet present in all the municipalities, and when the CAPs are available, there is lack of qualified health professionals to handle these patients. (P19)

● DISCUSSION

The findings of this study corroborate the results of previous studies^(3,5-6,9) according to which the onset of alcohol use occurs mainly during adolescence and is stimulated by friends and relatives. A study carried out in Rio de Janeiro revealed that adolescents are initiating drinking at an earlier age, due to easy access and their natural curiosity that makes them prone to explore new areas and seek new experiences and emotions.⁽⁷⁾ Also, individuals whose parents or other relatives are heavy drinkers often reproduce these habits and engage early in binge drinking.⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾

Corroborating our findings, the literature reported that excessive drinking has also been related to traumatic factors and situations, such as depression, stress, anxiety, obesity, marital problems and death of a close relative.⁽¹¹⁻¹²⁾ A study conducted in India with women dependent on alcohol and other drugs showed that the onset of addiction was triggered by the loss of their husbands, search for pleasure and mitigation of emotional pain.⁽¹³⁾

Besides easy access to alcohol and the occurrence of traumatic, stressful and/or difficult situations, it is important to emphasize that the habit of consuming alcoholic beverages is perceived as a cultural behavior in Brazil, which is reinforced by the media.⁽³⁻⁴⁾ These factors can lead individuals to lose control over addiction, as shown in the second category of the study.

Alcohol-dependent individuals usually seek various forms of treatment and remain abstinent for some time. However, the desire to drink becomes more and more persistent, and they start drinking some time later.⁽¹⁴⁾ Users seek hospital-based alcohol detoxification when they perceive themselves immersed in a very difficult situation, facing professional difficulties and family conflicts, as well as biological and

psychological damage.⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁶⁾ This seems to be the time when alcohol-dependent people accept their illness and recognize that they need help to get rid of addiction.⁽¹⁷⁾

Alcohol-dependent individuals seek hospitalization not only to get professional help, but also to move away from society and hence from alcohol. The initial phase of the detoxification process in the hospital setting is the basis of treatment maintenance. However, this aspect should be discussed with the users, because as soon as they are reintegrated to society, alcohol will become a problem again. Thus, strategies to ensure that these individuals complete their alcohol abuse treatment programs, avoiding relapses, are necessary.

Thus, we emphasize that mental health services must offer treatment programs that meet the needs of alcohol-dependent individuals, focusing on the integral adherence to the treatment and preventing discontinuation.⁽¹⁸⁾ Support from family members and friends was considered essential for the success of alcohol detoxification and abstinence, corroborating the results of a previous study.⁽¹⁸⁾ Family support was considered a motivational factor for a successful detoxification of alcohol and drug users in Berlin, Germany.⁽¹⁹⁾ Support from friends is also a source of motivation for coping with the changes and the initial difficulties of the treatment.^(9,11)

Another aspect reported by the users as positive during hospital treatment was the development of friendly relations with their peers. These friendly relations among users make it possible to develop collective strategies to cope with the problems experienced during hospitalization, such as loneliness and withdrawal crises.^(2,20) A study conducted in England also emphasized the importance of support and mutual help among users in the process of detoxification.⁽²¹⁾

Regarding the hospital-based treatment, the establishment of a routine, with the definition of a schedule for day-to-day activities was stressed by the users. Compliance with rules and routines is a key aspect for the success of the treatment, as it stimulates the commitment and responsibility of the patients with their daily activities. It is also an exercise of adaptation for hospital discharge and social reintegration of patients.⁽¹⁷⁾

In the final phase of the treatment program, users realize they are able to keep addiction to alcohol under control and feel confident to resume their social and family lives.⁽²⁾ However, North American researchers emphasize that the maintenance of therapeutic links with health services is essential to ensure that the detoxification process continues after hospital discharge.⁽²²⁾ Among mental health programs and services in Brazil, the Center for Psychosocial Care Alcohol and Drugs (CAPSad) plays an important role in the rehabilitation of alcohol-dependent individuals after detoxification in a hospital setting.⁽²³⁻²⁴⁾

Thus, the concern expressed by one of the professionals about the importance of the organization and the structuring of the network of mental health services to ensure the completion of the detoxification treatment in the hospital where the study was conducted. Therefore, strategies for the insertion and follow-up of users after hospital discharge in mental health network services should be discussed.

● CONCLUSION

Based on the phenomenon "Resuming life after a hospital-based alcohol detoxification treatment", this study demonstrated that the hospitalization of alcohol-dependent individuals to treat this condition provides an opportunity of productive reinsertion of these individuals in the society.

The development of addiction to alcohol and the meaning of hospital treatment of detoxification for people with alcoholism were presented through five categories: Onset of alcohol dependence; Loss of control of drinking; Seeking alcohol detoxification in a hospital setting; Realizing the benefits of hospital-based detoxification treatment, and Preparing for discharge.

These results contribute to the improvement of the practice of nursing and health professionals who provide care to alcohol-dependent individuals. Understanding the process of detoxification experienced

by people addicted to alcohol is essential for the development of strategies to help them control addiction during the treatment and maintenance phases.

One limitation of this study concerns the small size of the sample, as data was collected only from one psychiatric hospital. Thus, it is suggested that further studies on other hospital settings are conducted. Moreover, the process of social reintegration of people who have completed detoxification deserves greater consideration.

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