



## Up Close & Personal

### The Vacant Stare



Like drug addiction and alcoholism, compulsive gambling is an equal opportunity disease. It welcomes all comers regardless of sex, age, race, ethnicity, education, wealth or status. Alex found that out as he stared into a mirror a couple of years ago and finally realized that he desperately needed help. In that moment, it became clear to him that his intellect, knowledge and advanced college degrees were no protection against his own inner frailties.

“I had been on a three month gambling binge,” Alex recalls now, “and didn’t have enough money left for the dollar slot machines. That last morning in the casino hotel room when I looked in the mirror and saw the vacant stare of an addict, I knew something had to change. I could either deal with what I had become or lose myself entirely. The very frightening and unacceptable alternatives were prison, insanity or death.”

*“The . . . alternatives were prison, insanity or death.”*

That single, final gambling experience cost Alex \$70,000. But, it was simply the last chapter in a long story in which he describes his behavior with words like, “lying,” “cheating,” and “stealing.” “I was so hooked on

those slot machines,” he says, “that my car just seemed to drive itself to the casino; I couldn’t leave until I had lost everything.”

Fortunately, Alex’s response to the image in the mirror was to find a trained gambling therapist, join Gamblers Anonymous (GA) and eventually enter an in-patient gambling treatment facility. “Once I got into quality recovery,” he says, “things really began to change. Suddenly I realized that I was spiritually bankrupt; my intellect wasn’t going to cure this illness and obviously it had a lot to do with my emotions and feelings.”

In fact, Alex is now able to trace his illness back 10 to 15 years before he started gambling compulsively. “What became clear,” he explains, “is that I was covering up my feelings using slot machines as an anesthetic. It wasn’t really about the money and gambling, it was all about who I was down deep. Truly I would not have the solid recovery that I now have today without the help of all the professionals who really understand the disease of compulsive gambling. After so many years, I finally feel at peace with myself. All of that help literally saved my life.”

Even as he experiences the personal joy of recovery, Alex thinks of the other compulsive gamblers who are still stuck in their illness. “I wish everyone could obtain the type of help that I’ve gotten,” he says. “There are so many people out there just like me. If only they could look into a mirror as I did and really see the horrific reality of what they have become, where they could end up . . . but without that first step, all the help in the world doesn’t do very much good.”



Gambling Problem?  
Yours? A friend’s?  
A family member’s?

Call the FCCG 24-hour  
HelpLine  
888-ADMIT-IT  
(888-236-4848)

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Make check payable to the **Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling.**

### Our Mission:

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc. (FCCG), established in 1988, is a not-for-profit 501 (c)(3) educational and advocacy corporation under contract with the Florida state government. The FCCG's primary mission is to help persons adversely affected by difficulties due to problem and compulsive gambling. The FCCG maintains a neutral stance on the issue of legalized gambling while seeking to assist citizens in need of support. Governed by a volunteer Board of Directors, the FCCG is an affiliate of the National Council on Problem Gambling.

# From Our President

by Paul Ashe



## Criminal Intent or Gambling Bent?

Given their "drug of choice" is money, most compulsive gamblers eventually find themselves in deep financial trouble. Then in their unending quest for funds, they end up violating the law. It starts with "white lies" and minor improper acts like spending money on gambling earmarked for family needs or other necessities. From there on it progresses to stealing from family members, friends, employers and businesses. In most cases, gamblers convince themselves that they are just taking a small loan or advance until they can make the big win and pay it all back.

The most frequent type of criminal act committed in these instances is the writing of bad checks. Of course gamblers intend to make these checks good but unfortunately such lesser crimes easily lead to more drastic criminal acts like embezzlement, insurance or tax fraud, theft or robbery and drug dealing. Even though compulsive gamblers do not have the initial willful "criminal intent" to commit wrongful acts, their hell bent desire to gamble far outweighs the risk of getting caught.

There is little awareness on the part of the legal and law enforcement community regarding the significant impact compulsive gambling has on crime in today's world. Therefore, questions are not asked and the real motivation for a crime is never acknowledged or addressed in the process. Although the courts usually recognize special or mitigating circumstances regarding crimes caused by alcohol or drug addiction, cases attributed to compulsive gambling are not handled with the same consideration.

In order to minimize the adverse effects that compulsive gambling has on society, it is imperative to educate and train lawyers, judges and all branches of law enforcement about its effects and impacts. (See page 6 outlining available training.) Compulsive gambling is also a treatable disorder and the rehabilitation of the offender is more valuable to society than the need for punishment for the crime. A very important element in a compulsive gambler's recovery program is "restitution" which should minimize the adverse effect of the crime committed. In most criminal cases involving compulsive gamblers, the prerequisite "criminal intent" is not present at the onset of the criminal activity. As such, the judicial system needs to recognize and utilize alternative or mitigating sentences for such offenders.

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) sponsors training programs for law and legal authorities to better understand the effects of compulsive gambling on crime and clients, and offers services for impaired professionals to aid high profile persons (e.g. judges, lawyers, doctors, athletes) experiencing difficulties due to gambling. The agency is also working toward the inclusion of compulsive gambling as an addiction under Florida Drug Court jurisdiction. If accomplished, the judicial system will be better equipped to institute alternative and mitigating sentencing programs, reduce repeat offenders and lower costs to society. This would further aid those who lack the prerequisite "criminal intent" to access therapeutic justice and increase the likelihood of such persons regaining status as contributing members of society.

# Executive Director's Update

by Pat Fowler



## Professional Certification Has Come a Long Way

Back in 1988, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) launched its 24-HelpLine operation, providing supportive intervention and information for callers experiencing gambling related problems. Almost immediately following the HelpLine's implementation, it became apparent the FCCG needed to become actively involved in the development of treatment services to aid callers seeking assistance, particularly in light of the lack of state funding for such supports.

At that time, the Council identified as its goal, the creation of "appropriate" treatment services provided by trained clinicians able to assist problem gamblers and those they adversely affect. Historical data from the fields of addiction and mental health research reveal clear evidence that clinical professionals, even those with a high level of competency, were ill prepared to treat most compulsive gamblers and their families. This fact, coupled with the absence of Florida state requirements for compulsive gambling treatment professionals, was the impetus for the creation of the FCCG's training through the National Council on Problem Gambling's certification program. National certification offered the highest level of training and supervision available in the country.

The FCCG never sought to train and certify every treatment professional in the state. On the contrary, it was the agency's objective to develop a cadre of highly skilled professionals statewide to supply gambling specific treatment to persons in need of assistance. Currently, the FCCG's 60-hour base certification training is provided at little to no cost to participants. The training program is rapidly expanding due to the positive response of participants and the growing demand for compulsive gambling specific treatment. Professionals seeking certification as a National Compulsive Gambling Counselor must also complete supervision and pass the national exam (See page 5 for further information). The FCCG also offers certification training through partnerships with community-based providers as a means of increasing clinical services to callers located in areas without existing support.

However, services remain unavailable in areas of Florida due to the lack of state funding for gambling treatment. In response to this void, the FCCG established the Preliminary Assessment and Treatment Supports (PATS) Program and furnishes stipends to certified professionals who perform initial screening for FCCG HelpLine referrals. National Compulsive Gambling Counselors who wish to participate in the PATS program are required to attend PATS specific training which offers an additional 7.5 hours of Continuing Education Units (CEUs). CEUs for FCCG training are also recognized by certifying boards in Florida in fields of mental health, addiction, social work, marriage and family counseling, psychology and criminal justice.

We invite you to join us as a pioneer in this field. If you are interested in becoming a part of the FCCG network, contact us to inquire what is, or can be, available in your area. For information, contact Mary Traynor, FCCG Program/ Training Director at 407-865-6200 or via e-mail at [mtraynor@gamblinghelp.org](mailto:mtraynor@gamblinghelp.org). We look forward to hearing from you!

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# What's New

## The Process of Interventions for Compulsive Gamblers

By Thomas Talley, NCGC, AIS

In my practice as a Family Intervention Specialist, I get phone calls from compulsive gamblers in crisis. They may be facing bankruptcy, loss of employment, divorce or perhaps they are even contemplating suicide. Whatever the reasons, those people are sufficiently motivated to seek help and because of that, they have a good chance of a stable recovery.



*Tom Talley  
National Certified Gambling Counselor  
Family Intervention Specialist  
St. Petersburg, Florida*

Often as not, the call is from a relative of a compulsive gambler, typically a very upset and angry spouse. A quick response is crucial in this situation; a meeting with the closest family members, and perhaps one or two friends, should take place within six to 12 hours of that initial call. When the gathering does take place, even if the only people attending are just me and the gambler's spouse, a careful assessment of the entire situation is conducted and I begin to educate the participants about the illness of compulsive gambling. My goal is to encourage each of them to move towards their own recovery regardless of what the gambler does. When the time is right, the gambler is invited to participate.

It is of primary importance in this process that everyone begin to understand that the problem is the disease of compulsive gambling and not the gambler. It is equally imperative that family members recognize that although they didn't cause the problem, they have enabled the gambler to continue what he or she is doing to a great extent.

Although this may all sound like a standard drug/alcohol intervention, with compulsive gamblers there is a significant financial component the interventionist must be familiar with. One of the first things to determine is, "Who controls the money in the family?" If the gambler has been in control of the money, immediate steps

need to be taken to protect the family's assets by taking that control away. No matter what, a compulsive gambler's access to assets of any kind needs to be highly restricted.

In talking to the family about finances, it is my job to help them trace the "money path" so they not only understand how they may have contributed to the problem but can also clearly see how deeply in debt the gambler really is. Credit reports and bank statements are excellent places to start this search and contribute a great deal to the effort to accumulate hard data. What we are doing, of course, is establishing a body of evidence with which to confront the gambler.

In the process of gathering information, I get the family members to explain in writing, without anger, exactly how the gambler's actions have impacted them. Once the letters are ready and participants are prepared to read them to the gambler, one person (usually the spouse) invites the gambler to a family gathering where I will be facilitating the discussion. With a little guidance from me ahead of time, that designated contact person carefully plans what to say and when done right, there is a good chance the gambler will become involved in the conversation.

*"Intervention . . . is as much for the family as it is for the gambler."*

If the gambler does attend the meeting, and if I have done my job of helping the family members understand that for their loved one gambling is a drug and compulsive gambling is a sickness, then there will be a good chance the gambler will begin the process of recovery. But, even if the gambler doesn't attend or refuses help, the family itself has already started a healing process that I work very hard to keep on track. Intervention, you see, is as much for the family as it is for the gambler.





## FCCG Offers Services to Health Care Professionals

# Special Focus

In reviewing this newsletter, medical, mental health, addictions and other health care professionals may ask themselves important questions like: “Is this a topic I need to know, or want to become more familiar with?” “Do I have the time to see compulsive gamblers and their loved ones, and if I do, why do I need specialized certification?” “Is compulsive gambling that pressing an issue among my clients or within my community?” These are very valid questions and professionals should be able to reply affirmatively before enrolling in FCCG training programs.



Did you know that:

- Older adults who are problem gamblers are significantly more likely to consume alcohol weekly or more often; use non-prescription drugs once a month or more; rate their health as only fair or poor; have experienced the death of someone close in the past year; and, express symptoms of depression?
- Research indicates that persons under age 18 are two to four times at risk of developing a gambling problem?
- More than 750,000 adult Floridians, 18 years of age and older, have experienced problems due to gambling at some point within their lives, and thousands of others are adversely affected?
- Studies have shown that anywhere between 30-50% of persons presenting in alcohol and substance abuse treatment are suffering from the ill effects of gambling addiction?
- Compulsive gamblers reveal higher rates of depression and suicide than persons suffering from other addictive disorders?

Understanding the relationship and behaviors surrounding compulsive gambling and substance abuse is crucial in ensuring an accurate and comprehensive client diagnosis. Too often, our HelpLine callers are faced with the stark reality that there is a lack of available services throughout the state and attendance at self-help meetings sometimes requires travel in excess of two hours.

It is up to you to decide. Compulsive gamblers and their families need your help. Our HelpLine and related services are only meaningful if we can refer callers to certified treatment professionals. We will provide you with specialized training and related supports to help you aid existing clients, as well as meet the needs of a growing client base. If you have questions or would like additional information, don't hesitate to contact us or visit us on the web. The FCCG's new website features mini sites for adolescents and older adults, and provides a breadth of information.

## Professional Certification Trainings Scheduled

## Training Dates



Mental health, addictions and healthcare practitioners interested in providing treatment support to problem gamblers, their families and friends may begin the National Compulsive Gambling Counselor certification process by participating in the FCCG training schedule listed below. There are four days of training each in both Phase I and Phase II.

Phase I is a prerequisite for Phase II, but those interested only in an introduction to the topic of problem and compulsive gambling may attend any of the Phase I dates. The cost per session is \$30. (See the article above and call Mary Traynor, the FCCG's Program/Training Director at (407) 865-6200 for further information)

### 1. Tampa:

- Phase I - September 17, 18; October 1, 2
- Phase II - October 15, 16, 22, 23

### 2. Delray Beach:

- Phase II - July 23, 24

### 2. Daytona Beach:

- Phase II - July 20, August 17, September 21, October 19

### 3. Orlando:

- Phase II - July 21, August 18, September 22

# Special Focus

## Focus on Older Adults

On March 19, problem and compulsive gambling experts met with elder services providers and concerned Florida citizens in Fort Lauderdale for a conference titled, “Gambling Among Older Adults: Recreation or Risk?” Sponsored by the FCCG and the Broward Older Adult Workgroup, the one-day event launched a new statewide initiative to assist senior citizens experiencing difficulties with gambling and to protect others from similar problems.



Recognizing that the education of seniors, providers of older adult programs, clinicians and policymakers across the state was a critical first step in this effort, the FCCG is now:

- Providing a 60-hour problem and compulsive gambling training program (See article on page 5 for details) for staff members under a pilot program with the Broward Elder and Veterans Services Division
- Developing a one-day (7.5 hour) older adult clinical training program that will be offered to mental health, addictions and other healthcare professionals who have completed the 60-hour gambling certification course

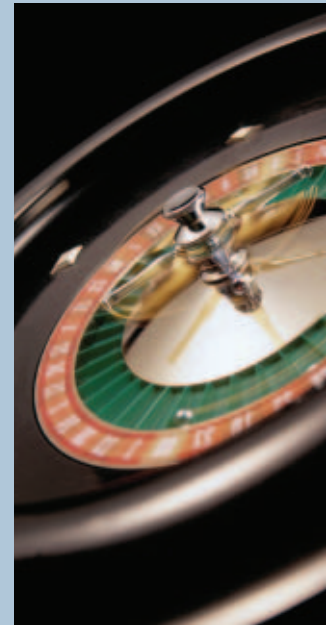
## Gaming Industry Thrust

The implementation of Responsible Gaming Programs (RGPs) in legal wagering venues throughout Florida is a major goal of the FCCG. The RGPs are designed to offer the gaming industry the necessary education and resources to identify and assist problem and compulsive gamblers. The core of this effort is a strong training component for gaming employees.

The education of employees in the gambling industry is designed to create effective frontline assistance for people who have been adversely affected by out-of-control betting. The term “employee” has a very broad definition in the Responsible Gambling Program that includes:

- Administrative and support staff
- Ancillary service staff
- Advertising and marketing team
- Gaming employees
- Employee Assistance Program staff

This comprehensive training within the gaming organization is intended to protect the consumer, the facility operator and the entire community. Once employees understand problem and compulsive gambling issues and impacts, what to do in specific situations and how to refer consumers for help, they become important partners in combating an illness that rivals the devastation brought about by drug and alcohol addiction.



## Help on the Legal Front

For attorneys, judges, police and probation officers who must deal with the legal misdeeds of problem and compulsive gamblers firsthand, help is now available. The FCCG stands ready to provide training that will assist legal and law enforcement professionals in understanding:

- When and how to apply the pathological gambling standard
- What to do in specific situations
- Where to go for assistance
- Case preparation and legal considerations
- How to better serve this client population

The FCCG training serves as the core requirement for individuals interested in obtaining certification as a National Gambling Counselor. To learn more about this program or to request a training in your area, call Mary Traynor, Program and/Training Director at (407) 685-6200.



# In the Limelight

## Compulsive Gambling – A Treatable Brain Disease

By Chet Bell, President, Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association (FADAA) and Executive Vice President, Stewart-Marchman Center, Daytona Beach, FL



*Chet Bell  
President, Florida Alcohol and  
Drug Abuse Association (FADAA)  
and Executive Vice President  
Stewart-Marchman Center  
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The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG) is hard at work across the state, spreading the word to those for whom gambling has become pathological, that there is hope and that effective treatments exist. So too the Council is at work educating addiction treatment providers in the state that compulsive gambling is a behavior similar in origin to chemical addiction and whose treatment is closely related to the interventions employed in addiction treatment.

One of compulsive gambling's recognized primary risk factors is alcohol abuse. Alcohol is well known for its ability to lower inhibitions and impair judgment. Research into the effects of gambling on the brain reveals that

imbalances in brain neurotransmitters serotonin, norepinephrine (adrenaline) and dopamine may be factors in compulsive gambling. Interestingly, variations in production of these same neurotransmitters are the cellular manifestation of chemical addictions such as alcoholism and addiction to drugs like cocaine and heroin.

*“ . . . there is hope and . . . effective treatments exist.”*

The substance abuse treatment community has been slow to respond to the issue of compulsive gambling, even though evidence suggests that the lifetime prevalence of problem and compulsive gambling is more than three percent of the population. Additionally, a significant proportion of these gamblers have other diagnosable chemical addictions. Very often, indicators of problem or compulsive gambling are typically not assessed and subse-

quently not addressed in treatment planning by addictions counselors. The result is that a significant behavioral health problem – a potent addiction relapse trigger – is not addressed in treatment.

The Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling is actively engaged in training addictions counselors to treat the compulsive gambler and family members. Currently, the FCCG is conducting four eight-day trainings across the state. These trainings meet certification criteria for National Certification in the field of compulsive gambling. The Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association (FADAA) actively encourages its members to participate in such training and the Florida Certification Board offers continuing education units for those who attend.

Chemical dependency treatment providers across the state should consider the importance of expanding their delivery of behavioral health services to include treatment for compulsive gambling. Those agencies certified by the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling to provide assessment and treatment services are eligible for reimbursement from the Council for their assessment work.

Beyond that, there are some changes in state policy that should be considered. These include the addition of compulsive gambling as one of the addictions to be coded by providers in completing their State Integrated Substance Abuse Reports (SISAR) admissions and discharges. The resulting data would then clearly show the extent of the problem in the state as well as assuring that agencies add compulsive gambling assessment to their assessment processes. Finally, the Florida legislature should consider the issue of compulsive gambling and a determination made as to its relevance to Chapter 397, F.S. – Florida's addiction treatment statute.

The bottom line is this, compulsive gambling, like chemical addiction, is a brain disease. It is a disease affecting tens of thousands Floridians – and a disease for which effective treatments are known and should be made more widely available.

WHEN GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

**888-ADMIT-IT**

 **Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, Inc.** [www.gamblinghelp.org](http://www.gamblinghelp.org)

## Identifying Problem Gambling Behavior

Many clinicians find it challenging to identify a gambling problem in their clients, particularly as there are no visual signs or physical symptoms. Observation of the client's behavior and responses to specific questions can provide valuable clues. Another important resource of information are family members and others close to the gambler who are able to identify many of the following signs in the client's behavior, symptomatic of problem or compulsive gambling:

1. Blocks of time unaccounted for
2. Mood swings
3. Neglect of personal needs or responsibilities
4. Missing possessions or assets
5. Sudden need for money or loans
6. Ongoing borrowing of money from family and friends
7. Secrets/lying about money
8. Disproportionate amount of time spent gambling, as compared to other activities
9. Primary focus on gambling (e.g. wants to conduct social activities / vacations / special occasions at locations where there is gambling)
10. Boasts to others about winning, while often minimizing losses and exaggerating wins
11. Lost time at work or school
12. Argues with spouse, partner, other family members or friends about gambling
13. Behavior intensifies or changes when gambling
14. Difficulty sleeping or eating
15. Isolates

For additional information and assistance, call the FCCG 24-hour HelpLine 888-ADMIT-IT (888-236-4848).



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