

Demystifying addiction: An online educational resource

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A new free online educational resource has been developed by health researchers from the University of Otago, Wellington to help people learn about addiction directly from those who have experienced it.

The website shows a series of video clips from interviews with seven New Zealanders who have had alcohol and other drug problems, but who are now living full, happy and productive lives.

"The resource is primarily intended to help [medical students](#) and [health professionals](#) understand the psychological, social and cultural drivers of [addiction](#)," explains researcher Rachel Tester, "so they feel better equipped to help those in need."

"However, we also hope it will help to demystify and destigmatise addiction for health professionals, and be a useful learning tool for anyone interested in understanding recovery from addiction."

By providing access to personal stories, the resource aims to help people develop a broader understanding of addiction and an empathetic, non-judgmental approach to sensitive topics such as [substance abuse](#).

It also aims to help improve consultation competence of people in the health sector; their confidence in initiating alcohol and other drug discussions, exploring problematic use of drugs or alcohol, and supporting behavioural change.

Seven people who have experienced alcohol and other [drug addiction](#) were interviewed for the [pilot study](#). The resource was developed by Rachel Tester, Dr Helen Moriarty, Dr Maria Stubbe and funded by *Ako Aotearoa*, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence.

The people interviewed talk about what motivated them to change their behaviour, what recovery from addiction means for them, and what helped or hindered them in that process.

"This is the first New Zealand resource to be used in medical schools that puts individual experiences of addiction and recovery at the centre. In doing so it offers an alternative perspective to the more standard [disease model](#) of addiction, and challenges common social stereotypes and negative perceptions."

Five broad themes are identified and these have been illustrated in the online resource with selected video clips and corresponding transcripts. The theme titles are 'Personal', 'Recovery', 'Health Professionals', 'Trauma' and 'Mental Illness' and include sub-themes such as what does and doesn't help.

"The resource includes an exercise for students to critically self-reflect on their own attitudes towards addiction and current practice, and also a brief online survey for user feedback," says Tester.

"This will help us design a larger research project where we will interview a wider range of people about their experiences and recovery from addiction."

Access the online resource at the *Ako Aotearoa* [website](#).

Provided by University of Otago

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