

## The Stigma of Addiction - 12 Step Recovery

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From Dr. Mel Poh's book [Pain Recovery](#) ...

Why are the words “addiction” and “addict” so problematic for so many people? Much of this difficulty can be attributed to the stigma that is assigned to them. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines stigma as “a mark of shame or discredit.”\* It is often attached to social judgment and cultural norms. The stigma attached to “addiction” and “addict” makes them “dirty” words. Despite volumes of research on drug dependence and scientific evidence to the contrary, addiction is viewed by many as a moral failing or weakness. Addicts and their families are subjected to social, legal, and financial discrimination, making it difficult for them to obtain the help they need. When addicts do access help, insurance is inadequate to cover the cost of effective treatment. Family members are often the most judgmental because they have experienced the consequences of the addict’s behavior, not realizing the addict is sick, not “bad.”

Addiction is one of the few diseases that carries such a negative emotional charge and is a source of shame or embarrassment. Who would want to have a diagnosis or label that carries such a stigma? For those with chronic pain who take opioids, attempting to discuss this topic is often met with resistance and denial.

Usually people begin taking medication to manage physical pain, but at some point, often without realizing it, start using the medication to manage emotional pain as well. Eventually the medications no longer work for long or very well to ease the physical or emotional pain, and the side effects may actually cause more physical and emotional pain. This happens because long-term use of opioids can increase the body’s and brain’s pain signals. This is called pain rebound syndrome or opioid-induced hyperalgesia. In the end, medication use that started as a reasonable treatment approach to relieve suffering can be the cause of problems in all areas of your life.