THE DISEASE DEFINITION

"Chemical Dependency" is a:

PRIMARY
CHRONIC
PROGRESSIVE,
INCURABLE disease characterized by
LOSS OF CONTROL over alcohol and
Other DRUGS.

By looking at each component of the definition the disease becomes easier to understand:

PRIMARY:
It comes first - Chemical Dependency is a disease that causes problems. Problems do not cause chemical dependency.

CHRONIC:
This means it lasts a long time. Most people have the disease 10-15 years before they receive treatment for it. It doesn't get bad quickly. This fools many people into resisting treatment in the early stage.

PROGRESSIVE:
It becomes worse with time. In this area chemical dependency is unique. If a person with chemical dependency stops drinking and using drugs and goes back to it 5 or 10 or 20 years later their disease symptoms take up where the drinking and drug use left off. They never go back to the beginning stage. They will never be social drinkers or social drug users. If they were physically impaired when they stopped they will be back at that stage usually within a short time of resuming drinking or drug use.

INCURABLE:
If a person develops the disease of chemical dependency they can never go back. The will ALWAYS have the disease, whether they drink or use drugs or not. It can be arrested (stopped from progressing) by not drinking or using drugs. Only then can they live a normal life. Now let's discuss the most important part of the definition.

LOSS OF CONTROL:
Most people think that this means that the chemically dependent person gets drunk every time he drinks or over does it every time he uses drugs. WRONG! What loss of control really means is that the chemically dependent person can never PREDICT what will happen when he begins to drink or use. In other words, he no longer controls the alcohol or drug, the alcohol or drug
controls him. The loss of control is the primary determining factor in separating chemically dependent from non-chemically dependent people.

DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE

Alcohol and other drugs don't discriminate - they affect everyone mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Body is a chemical factory. Most people are born with a perfectly balanced chemical factory.

Somewhere on our timeline we decided to add another foreign chemical - alcohol/drugs. 1,000,000 reasons for making this decision. It doesn't matter why.

Initial Reaction of the body - reject it.

1st drunk - got sick: physical rejection

Feelings of guilt or depression? Know you were doing something you weren't supposed to do? Mental rejection.

Don't tell your parents or minister? Spiritual rejection.

Start losing touch with reality. Reality is - some people drink socially and some people don't. Denial System makes mind stronger than the body. Body says "Either we die or we figure out a way to tolerate this stuff." Body never accepts; only tolerates.

Body learns how to not stagger, how to drive with alcohol or drugs in the body. Get used to the drug. Body builds tolerance slowly - another aspect of progression. Denial system lets body keep on drinking.

Different amounts of alcohol in the blood stream will have different effects on the brain and body. This chart demonstrates some of the effects alcohol has on behavior.

.02 - .04, the first effects will be a loss of judgement. The drinker may find that he says or does things which he would "think twice" about, had he not been drinking.

At .06, he will find that the time it takes for his eye to recover from glare will be greatly slowed down. If a car comes toward him with its bright lights on, it will blind him for a longer period of time. His ability to see on either side of his head will be diminished.

.08 is the legal level for intoxication in North Carolina and most states. That is because no matter whom you are, at a .10 your reaction time is greatly reduced. The time it takes to put your foot quickly on your car brakes or to swerve into another lane will be lowered down and your chances of having an accident increase enormously.

At .16 you will begin to stagger; again because your cerebellum is being affected.
At .20  sensitivity to pain, pleasure, cold, hot, etc., decreases sharply. You may have heard the expression, "so drunk" he was "feeling no pain." That in fact is what happens, because the nerve endings are asleep and their ability to communicate with the brain cut off. This leads to people falling cutting themselves, and not seeking medical help until the next day when they may sober up an begin to feel the pain. Lots of alcoholics get frost bitten in the winter, walking around without a coat. They don't feel cold, but they are getting over-exposed and frost bitten.

At .25 you may find that your ability to make your body act at all is lost, such that you may want to get up and walk into the other room, but your legs refuse to respond.

At .40 and .50 death can occur. Normal social drinkers never get up into these very high ranges of intoxication, because they either stop drinking, get sick, or pass out. The alcoholic develops what we call tolerance to alcohol. If you think back to when you had your first drinking experience, you may remember that 2 beers made you high whereas now, 2 beers would have little or no effect. The alcoholic's brain can accommodate an amount of alcohol, which would kill a normal person. The alcoholic finds he has to increase his intake in order to get what 6 beers used to do. He now requires 12 for the same effect.

It is possible to overdose on alcohol. Every year we have college kids who drink too much grain alcohol, come into the ER, comatose and have to be put on respirators in order to avoid suffocation.

Physical addiction:

Takes more alcohol/drug to get same effect.

Body demands the drug to function normally. Lose option to take it or leave it. Physical dependence develops inspite of not accepting the drug.

Progression - withdrawal. Physical withdrawal:

Body is angry again. At first angry because mind was putting in foreign chemical, now angry because it's not being put in. In beginning - take chemical to feel better. In end - take chemical to feel normal.

Withdrawal is the term we use to describe what happens when a drug addict or alcoholic who is physically addicted, stops using alcohol or drugs. Alcoholism starts as a psychological addiction, but with time, it becomes a physical one as well.
This process takes place over time. The first symptoms of withdrawal will be the "morning after" shakes, inner and outer tremulousness and nervousness. With time the severity of withdrawal increases, including nausea, the sweats, inability to eat, irregular pulse, irregular heart beat and respiration and in advanced cases may include DTs or seizures. The body becomes so accustomed to having alcohol, that when it is removed, it goes into a state of shock. DTs or delirium tremens include all of the above symptoms, plus hallucinations, seeing and/or hearing things which are not there. This experience is as real to the person in DTs as our talking to one another now. DTs is a life-threatening situation; 15% of people in DTs die as a result.

Body starts to break down. Body is affected and it can't not be affected. Alcohol and drugs become disrupters. Alcohol doesn't discriminate. Physical deterioration happens to everyone - some people are affected quicker than others are. It is as if your body parts are time bombs just waiting to go off - and you can't tell if your body has a long or a short fuse.