Recovery Can Stall Despite Doing Everything Right

If talking about the problem at hand hasn't fixed the problems, it might not be your fault. I'm Dr. Arun Podesta. If you or someone you love is stuck in recovery despite therapy, meetings, or medications, there might be a missing piece that many people haven't really thought about.

What many people don't realize until they're deep into the recovery process is that therapy alone doesn't always lead to the relief they are hoping for.

You can be fully engaged in treatment, showing up to every session, doing everything that's asked of you and you can still feel stuck. Still feel overwhelmed, still like you're barely holding things together even while technically you are doing EVERYTHING right.

And if a loved one that you're with, watching someone care about is struggling in spite of their major efforts, it can be so disheartening. And it's natural to ask questions like, why isn't this working?

What's missing? The truth is, the system that we often call treatment tends to focus almost entirely on thoughts, behaviors, coping strategies. without actually deeply addressing the body that those thoughts and behaviors depend upon.

Why Therapy Alone May Not Be Enough

And that's a critical oversight. Because when the cells are depleted, when cells and the bodies are inflamed or chronically dysregulated, which is often the case in people struggling with addiction, the brain just can't fully engage in the process of healing.

Therapy might be happening, but it doesn't land, it does not integrate. It can not. There is a biological foundation that therapy is needing to expect the therapy to work and for many people, especially in early recovery, that foundation is actually damaged and has been for probably a long time.

So until we address what first we have to understand and then address that piece, we risk placing all the responsibility on the patient's mindset or motivation rather than recognizing what their body is actually capable of in that moment.

And that's the part I want to walk you through because once you see what's been missing, You'll understand why so many people plateau in recovery, and more importantly, what can help them move forward.

Once we understand that therapy alone might not be enough, the next question becomes, well, why? What are the missing pieces? what are gaps and how do we start filling them?

Before I answer that, I want to hear from you. Was something you or your loved one or if you're a treatment provider your patient tried in recovery that just didn't seem to work and left you wondering why?

Let me know in the comments. Your experience might truly help someone else that feels like they're stuck. Now let's get back to understanding what is the missing piece from your loved one's treatment and how we can fill those gaps.

Addiction's Impact on Brain and Body

To answer that, we need to look at how addiction impacts the brain and the body, not just during substance use, but sometimes long after someone stops.

Now, we know that addiction, it's truly not just a pattern of behaviors. It's a full body and brain condition, altering brain chemistry, disrupting hormone balance, damaging the gut brain connection, impairing sleep architecture, and depleting the very nutrients the brain needs to function well.

When someone enters recovery, they might be mentally ready to heal. But physiologically, their system's still in survival mode. Their stress response is still activated.

They're neurotransmitters and their cofactors are frequently depleted. There digestive and immune systems may be inflamed or impaired. Their sleep might so disrupted that the brain literally can't repair itself overnight when it's needing to sleep.

So even if they're showing up and fully committed, the Brain that I, as a treatment provider, and all of the people around them are trying to change, it might not have the raw materials to do what works.

I like to describe this as trying rebuild a house without addressing the foundation. You can paint the walls, you can rearrange the furniture, but if the structure underneath is unstable, nothing's gonna hold on for long, we know that.

We also know from research and from thousands and thousands of patient outcomes that these biological factors directly affect how well someone can regulate emotion.

can manage craving, can make decisions, and retain insight from therapy. When those systems are still dysregulated and it feels like therapy just doesn't stick, that can leave patients, families, treatment providers, Loved ones confused, discouraged and sometimes even blaming themselves.

But here's the shift. It's not about willpower or doing more. it's about recognizing that the body plays a central role in recovery.

Supporting the Whole System in Recovery

There's a cellular system that's necessary for recovery And until all of that is supported, real healing remains out of reach. What does that actually mean in practice?

It means that recovery just can't be talk based. It needs to be body based, cellular based whether you're in recovery yourself, walking along someone who is, or treating folks that are.

There are simple questions, powerful questions you can start to ask. Questions that can completely shift the trajectory of healing. Start by asking, is the body, are the cells being supported to heal?

Or why are we only focusing on the mind? Because when we work with the whole system, head to toe, inside out, the brain, gut, nervous system, sleep cycle, that's when therapy begins to integrate.

That's where the person in recovery stops just coping and starts truly stabilizing. For example, if someone still struggles with focus, with motivation, emotional regulation, or cravings are through the roof, it might not be a mindset issue.

It might be Cofactor depletion, poor sleep, a depleted gut, A brain that's still inflamed from years of stress and substance use. That's why I always encourage people to ask their care teams about getting blood work, things like nutrition, gut recovery, sleep quality.

Ask whether there's support in place for anxiety, for depression, chronic pain, not just from a psychological lens, but a physiological one. And don't wait for sleep to improve on its own.

Most people in early recovery struggle with sleep. Quality sleep is not a luxury in recovery. It is part of treatment. pair when synapses regenerate, when resilience is actually built during sleep.

Also, never underestimate the role of connection, connecting with others, feeling safe with other, being in supportive environments, experiencing real human closeness, safe closness.

Healing Takes Time and an Integrative Approach

All of that truly changes brain chemistry. It raises dopamine tone, it raises serotonin, It reduces relapse risk. It literally rewires the system towards safety and stability.

So again, this isn't about doing more. it's about looking under the hood and doing what actually works. If someone is still struggling in recovery, it might not because they're doing it wrong.

It might be because they haven't been given the kind of care their body truly needs. Before we wrap up, I want to leave you with a final reminder. Healing, it's definitely not linear.

It doesn't unfold in neat, predictable steps. it is a process that requires time, requires patience, and the support that is needed for each individual patient.

For many people, recovery feels frustrating, not because their failing, but because the approach that they have been giving is incomplete. When we finally address the whole person, the mind, brain, body, cellular, biochemistry, things actually shift.

Therapy starts to land, energy improves, stability is built. And those stuck points that once felt impossible to start, they actually loosen up. This isn't about replacing therapy.

It's about giving therapy what it needs to actually work. I've seen this integrative approach change lives across countless treatment settings. If this resonated with you and you want to understand more about what's really happening beneath the surface of addiction and recovery, I encourage you to keep going.

Watch the next video. Let's continue the journey together. Thank you for watching.