Internet Addiction Essay, Research Paper

Indications are that people using the Internet may be subject to a new illness in our society, Internet addiction. Is the Internet affecting your life in a negative way? Do you spend more time on the Internet when you should be doing something else? Internet surfing could become an addiction. I began to suspect that I had an Internet addiction problem when I would remain up until 3 A.M. to surf the net, and then I talked to a friend who had not been to bed yet. He was still surfing the Internet at 3 o’clock.

The Internet is an amazing information resource. Students, teachers and researchers use it as an investigative tool. Physicians use it to learn more about unfamiliar diseases and the latest medical developments. Everyone else uses it for shopping, banking, bill-paying and communicating with family and friends. People all over the globe use it to connect with individuals of other countries and cultures.

“It’s opened up a whole new world,” a friend explained. “You never know exactly where the journey will take you. Doors open and you take off in new directions. You can learn about anything – I mean anything! And you never have to be lonely there is always someone out there to connect with.”

But for some people, the computer world rivals their real world. Some people choose to commune with a computer, rather than their spouses and children. While they expand their horizons electronically, they insulate themselves from intimate settings and relationships. Internet abuse has been cited as a contributing factor in the disintegration of marriages and families and the collapse of promising careers. Dr. Ivan Goldberg, a New York City psychiatrist who coined the term “Internet Addiction Disorder,” explained IAD is not a recognized medical addiction like alcoholism, but “more like an out-of-control behavior that threatens to overwhelm the addict’s normal life.

“Such use continues despite knowledge of a persistent or recurrent physical, social or psychological problem caused or exacerbated by net use, such as sleep deprivation, marital difficulties, lateness for early morning appointments, neglect of occupational duties and feelings of abandonment in significant others,” Goldberg said. “Internet addiction has gained credibility among mental health professionals as a clinically significant disorder which negatively impacts social, occupational, family and financial functioning,” said Dr. Kimberly Young, director of the Center for Online Addiction at the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford, and reviewer of more than 400 IAD cases.

“Anyone with access to a modem and the Internet may become addicted,” Young warned. She said home based computer users are most at risk of developing IAD. Contrary to the stereotype of the computer nerd, a typical addict is a middle-aged female with limited education, although persons of all ages and social groups are prominent in her study. Dr. Nancy Wesson, a clinical psychologist in Mountain View, California pointed out people can develop behavioral addictions like IAD even when there is no true physiological dependence. She asserted obsessive net surfing could be just as addictive as excesses of other ordinary activities such as eating, sex, work and exercise.

Bill Cooley, a drug demand reduction specialist with Keesler’s mental health clinic, believes the anonymity of Internet communication, which allows a person to escape from reality, has great potential for compulsive behavior or misuse. “Many individuals go online and gain a sense of acceptance from people they don’t even know,” he suggested. “It’s a coming-home feeling that can entice people to the detriment of family, home, career and health.”

Some doctors are skeptical of specialists who apply psychiatric terms such as “addiction” or “dependence” to what may seem to be a harmless hobby, but Cooley stressed, “Hobbies don’t become harmful in terms of the attention they take away from important aspects of our lives — addictions do.” Cooley, who has extensive experience counseling individuals with substance abuse problems, indicated, “I don’t have any studies or data to prove it, but it wouldn’t surprise me to find that alcoholics and drug addicts move to the Internet in their search for validation, love or a sense of importance.” Is “surfing the net” a hobby or an addiction? You may have a problem if you have these symptoms:

+ You neglect important family activities, social events, work responsibilities, academic projects or health concerns to spend hours on the Internet.

+ A significant person, such as a boss, close friend or partner, has complained you have been spending too much time or money on the Internet.

+ You are constantly anticipating your next online session.

+ It becomes impossible to cut back on your Internet time.

+ You are determined to spend a brief period online, only to discover later that several hours have passed.

+ You check your e-mail compulsively.

+ You develop cravings and withdrawal symptoms when you are away from the computer.

+ You are skipping meals, classes or appointments to get on the Internet.

+ You would rather talk to people online than face-to-face;

+ You sleep less than five hours a night so you can spend more time online.

Since Internet Addiction Disorder is a relatively new mental health concern, few self help resources are available. Ironically, there are some online support groups designed to wean people from the Internet.