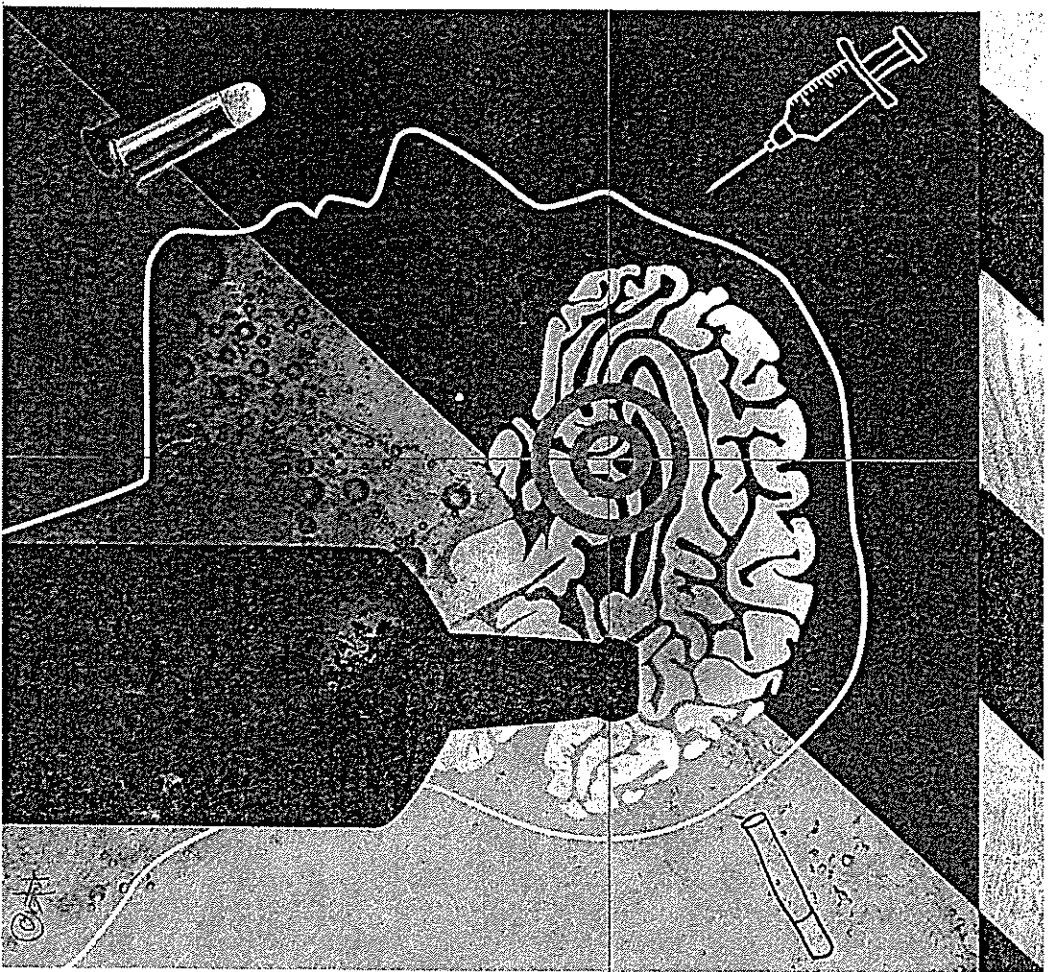


SPEAKUP

THE FORUM FOR YOUR IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS



ALCOHOL ADDICTION

Effective programs treat more than the abuser

Re the Sept. 21 Tropical Life story *Identify drinking problems*: In the article, the Rev. Sam Ciccolini says that, "Some people don't believe they can be alcoholics if they drink only beer. But that's not true." Some statistics to support his claim:

According to The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, people who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics; lifetime alcohol abuse is greatest for those who start at age 14; and underage drinkers and adult heavy drinkers combined consume 61 percent of alcohol sold in the United States.

Additionally, the Center's findings suggest that alcohol is far and away the top drug that American kids abuse. The college binge-drinking problem starts with children and teens, and that's where our prevention and education efforts must be focused.

The first reaction is always denial, so

the consequences of failing to intervene early and not providing age-appropriate treatment are substantial and long-term. Fortunately, despite the fact that there is no single treatment approach that works for all patients, standard treatment produced significant decreases in drug use. Such treatment consists mostly of psychotherapy and the spiritual 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous program.

Certain patient characteristics, along with treatment, are crucial to a positive outcome. Patients with stable family and work succeed at a higher rate. Therapy not only must treat the person with the drinking problem but the family system, too — with emphasis on teaching behavioral and lifestyle changes.

Ciccolini is right — families, along with treatment, are the key to "help guide the way to recovery" for the relative in need.

—MARIO E. CARBONELL, psychotherapist and certified addiction specialist, South Miami