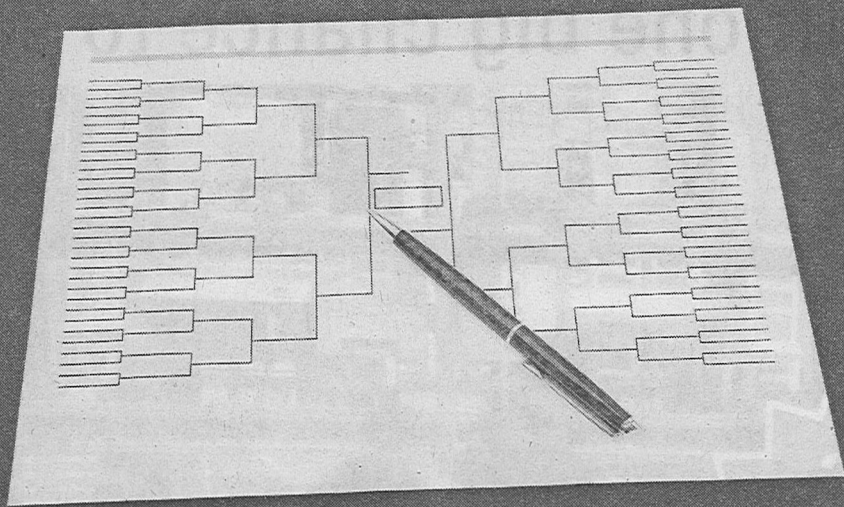


Speaking Out

AT ISSUE: PROBLEM GAMBLING



THINKSTOCK

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month. Problem gambling become acute for some at this time of year due to sports betting and office pools on college basketball games.

Hoops brackets a trigger for some

March is Problem Gambling Awareness Month.

With March Madness (NCAA Division 1 men's basketball championship tournament) activities beginning and the increased amount of sports betting surrounding "March Madness," March makes a good time to have the conversation about problem gambling with friends, partners and children.

For problem gamblers, March Madness describes their strong, persistent urges to gamble, regardless of the consequences. Gambling is all around us and social pressure to gamble can be strong, especially this time of the year.

Sports betting is a particularly easy way for someone to be introduced to gambling. Office pools and bracket competitions happen in the workplace, at schools and among friends and can make people feel like part of a team.

Sports betting is the most popular form of gambling among youth ages 14 to 22. Nearly 25 percent of males bet on sports in an average month. An estimated 60 million Americans filled out sports brackets last year, according to Las Vegas odds maker Pregame.com, and about \$12 billion is wagered on the March Madness tournament, making March the largest month for individual bets.

Jennifer Faringer

GUEST ESSAYIST



While gambling can be an entertaining pastime for some, for others it can quickly become a problem. If you or your loved one finds themselves preoccupied with betting, lying about how much money has been bet, feeling anxious or sleepless due to their betting activity, or borrowing money to keep betting, it is very possible that there is a problem with gambling.

Gambling can be a serious addiction that negatively impacts a person's job, relationships, health, well-being and finances.

Problem gambling has been called the hidden addiction because there are no visible signs to help identify the problem. As a result, problem gambling often goes undetected until a major crisis is experienced. The longer the problem gambling goes untreated, the greater the financial, emotional or health consequences can become.

Common health consequences of gambling disorder include:

» Sleep disorders.

- » Anxiety.
- » Heart disease.
- » Abuse of alcohol or other drugs.
- » Depression.
- » Digestive ailments.

Issues seemingly unconnected to gambling, like financial stress or health issues, may be an indicator that someone in your life has a gambling addiction.

Locally, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area provides education, resources and referrals for family members affected by the problem gambling of a loved one.

Presentations are available on the potential risks of problem gambling with emphasis on the risks associated with underage problem gambling.

Youth presentations focus on problem gambling and the influence of social media.

For more ideas on how to have the conversation, and information on problem gambling prevention and counseling resources, visit the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area at ncadd-ra.org or call (585) 719-3480.

Jennifer Faringer is president of National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-Rochester Area.