Addiction is among the cruelest of all conditions. On a superficially rational level, it makes no sense – not only to those who witness it, but also to those who suffer from it. No matter how intelligent, strong-willed, sensible and otherwise rational a person is, the compulsion an addict feels is often impossible to repel. A person with an addiction will almost certainly need professional help to overcome their condition as frequently they cannot do it alone.

We have all heard about various high-profile addictions – drink, drugs, sex, gambling – but addiction ranges far wider to include a host of insidious behaviours where the urge to behave in a certain way overrides all other considerations. Often this results in repeated patterns of behaviour that may manifest as self-harm, self-sabotage (where people feel compelled to destroy good work, actions or situations) or setting up situations that guarantee negative outcomes. The key point is that the urge to act in a certain way is always more powerful than the rational acceptance that it is not the right thing to do.

Psychotherapist Sonia Manning, Director of Anam Cara Holistic Centre, explains:

“An addiction holds a person to ransom, completely controls them and can have devastating consequences. While there is a non-harmful end of the spectrum – the sort of light-hearted quirks that become part of someone's character – most addicts find themselves living in the shadows of life, tormented and suffering.

“Addicts tend to blame themselves for the way they are but they should not. Psychology teaches us that the roots of addiction take hold in the vital first few months of life where the child’s relationship with its mother, or mother figure, is at its most intense and dependent. Where the child’s needs are not sufficiently met, especially in feeding, this has an impact on the creation of certain complex neurological pathways in the brain.

“These neurological pathways are like foundation stones: if they're not built properly then the structure on top of it is unstable – and when the stresses on it become too much, the whole edifice collapses. The personality collapses back to that original fault line and for certain people, this is where an addiction originates. For some, the torment begins almost immediately and stays with them, while for others the collapse happens decades later but the root cause is the same.”

When an individual with an addiction comes to Anam Cara, the team there address the addictive behaviour and symptoms on a number of levels, ensuring they deal with the immediate physical and psychological effects but also exploring the personality and family history as they seek to address the causes of the condition. As well as talking therapies, treatments such as carefully-defined, tailored acupuncture are excellent for intercepting the restlessness and impulsiveness that drives the person’s addiction. There is another aspect too, explains Sonia:

“We also address a person’s spiritual needs. People with addictions are often quite spiritual people, who are restless and searching. Without realising, people have got themselves into an addiction because of their soul-searching and because an addiction temporarily soothes that deepest restlessness – but of course, the hit doesn’t last far long so they seek it out again and again.

“The cycle of addiction is always the same – the addict feels the urge, resists it for as long as possible, then succumbs to it and feels the euphoric hit, which is soon followed by the agonising come-down of hopelessness, guilt and despair; then they resolve never to do it again and it'll be different this time…until the urge begins again. Doing this over and over and over again is exhausting and tormenting, and addicts are desperate for some peace and the freedom to be themselves, unshackled from the constant demands of their addiction.

“At Anam Cara, we want to help addicts. Their help needs to be methodical, thorough, comprehensive and led by a skilled professional. When the addict is ready to seek that help, then the work can begin.”