Drug addiction is a big issue in today’s world, but there are many accepted ways to rehabilitate people affected by drug addiction.

Opioid addiction is an epidemic in the United States today, causing tens of thousands of deaths a year and ruining many lives. This tragic state has been caused by the misuse of prescription painkillers that were given out en masse in the 1990s and early 2000s, with no regard to how addictive they are. This has left much of the United States population hooked on what is essentially a more pure heroin than you will find on the streets.

First, let's talk about the main reasons people get addicted to drugs, so that we might have a better idea of what methods will treat those. The leading reasons for drug addiction are genetic and environmental.

Beginning with environmental factors, things such as trauma, high stress level,economic class, or early exposure may also play a role in substance abuse. For example, the class divide in those who find treatment is astonishing. Those who do not make much money have no easy way of receiving treatment, and often these people end up in the streets. Drug addiction in poor communities is also common because of the lack of “affordable sources of pleasure and purpose.”

Someone's genes may just make them more susceptible to drug addiction, make someone more prone to sensation seeking, or make them compulsive, all of which may lead someone to abusing substances. The genetic component may also leave people with less receptive reward centers. These reward centers receive a type of hormone called dopamine as a reward for doing things that feel good, such as food, exercise, or drugs. These less active dopamine receptors mean that it takes more of a drug to feel good. This makes take more of the drug and makes them more likely to get addicted to it.

One form of rehabilitation for drug abusers is a 12 step rehabilitation program, such as alcoholics anonymous, to help with drug abuse rehabilitation. Generally you start off with 3 to 6 weeks in the hospital, and a more extensive outpatient care program. For example, the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous focus on admitting to god and others that the addict has done something wrong, and to make amends with the people they have harmed wherever possible. It also has a very large focus on using religious awakening and internal reflection to cause a change in behavior, as opposed to medical or therapeutic treatment. This is a very interesting take on rehabilitation that definitely helps a certain subset of drug addicts.

Another form of rehabilitation is detoxification, which is the gradual easing people off drugs. This can be done a couple of different ways, wither through giving smaller and smaller doses of the drug, or through substituting the drug for something else entirely. The process can change quite a bit from patient to patient, depending on their individual needs. However, trying detoxification without medical supervision is dangerous, and patients are urged to go see a doctor about medical detox. Simply quitting outright is dangerous and potentially fatal. Generally, detox follows these main steps. First, the patient is evaluated, with the doctors checking the patients blood for how much of the drug they've taken. Then, they are stabilised. This is where the patient goes through therapy, and gets prescribed any drugs to counteract the ones they are already taking. Finally, the patient is ready to enter a treatment program. These are used to make sure that the patient does not slip back into drug use after the detox is finished.

Individualised drug counseling is also a very useful method of rehabilitating drug abusers. This type of counseling focuses not only on stopping the abuse of drugs, but also on other useful goals like getting a job or rebuilding relationships with family and friends. It is very effective, especially when used with a 12 step program once or twice a week.

For heroin users, the safest form of rehabilitation is called methadone replacement therapy. This is when you replace the heroin someone is taking for a drug that is chemically structured similarly, but is not as harsh. This type of treatment is most effectively used on extreme heroin addicts, as it lessens the withdrawal symptoms and helps the addict to rejoin general society faster.

When drug abusers do get caught by the law, being forced to go to some kind of therapy or rehabilitation program in lieu of incarceration is proven to be more effective than jail or people not legally required to go. These people stay in treatment longer and generally recover better than those not legally coerced or those that are incarcerated.

Some countries supply clean drugs for addicts, along with giving treatment, as to quell the spreading of diseases and unclean drugs. While this may have its drawbacks, it is definitely effective in reaching its goals, and I believe the united states should employ some kind of similar system to help nonviolent drug users, instead of putting them in jail. This would also cut down on our massive prison population, as half a million people in our detention system are locked up for drug offenses.

All in all, there are a lot of treatment options available for people who are addicted to drugs, no matter which one that may be. The United States should work towards making more of these available to people in need, whether that be by decriminalising nonviolent drug offenses or by lowering the cost of rehabilitation to be more affordable to the public.