

# #Depends: A Rhetorical Analysis of a CAMH Ad about Addiction

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Despite not having traditional paragraphs and theses, photo advertisements seek to make traditionally rhetorical arguments by incorporating visual and textual techniques into combinations that hit emotional, logical and ethical notes. The subject of one such advertisement from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Canada (CAMH), first printed in 2013, features a victim of alcohol addiction speaking to the reader, a supposed eventual beneficiary of treatment for the same condition. A dramatic portrait of a middle-aged man with greying hair stares at the reader through text bifurcated by the page. One side represents the man, a victim of the tragic disease. The other side represents the man in recovery. Visually appealing, textually compelling, and rhetorically rich, this advertisement succeeds in promoting recovery, but ultimately fails to promote the institution.

The ad, part of a national mental health initiative is comprised of a visually stylized photo overlaid with moving text. The text begins with logos, noting the “1,500,000 with #AlcoholismInCanada,” but then quickly moves into pathos, where it remains. The statements on the left side illustrate the tragic nature of the disease of alcoholism, such as, “#NothingStopsTheCravings,” “LieToMyWife,” and “#AlcoholicDisintegration.” They paint a dark and painful image of life with this disease. The statements on the right, however, feature statements of recovery and success; a life without alcohol. Hashtags such as “#GoodSon,” “Daughter’sRecital,” and “#AFuture” ensure that the right side’s message is one of hope and happiness. While the narrative itself suggests that its key demographic is a middle-aged audience, an audience with jobs, spouses, and children, the ad’s use of the social media technique, hash-tagging, suggests otherwise. The hashtag feature is a characteristic with which many older readers may be unfamiliar, but those who have grown up with social media and computer technologies will identify with it. These two elements combined, the mature prose and the hashtags, make it a powerful piece for both adults and young adults.

The advertisement uses creative photographic techniques within the photo as well. The image background on the left side, that which depicts the tragic nature of alcoholism, is a shade darker than the right side. This creates a tension in the photo that draws the reader to the right side, the

more hopeful side, as they read. The image of the middle-aged man is also stretched slightly, on the left side, to create a darker and larger presence in the ad. This makes the left side of the photo less appealing and uglier by comparison. The combination creates a natural repulsion to the left side. The words themselves further contribute to the pathos of the argument as the terms of tragic loss are set against a black shading, in white type. Juxtapose this to the black script backed by white shading on the opposite side, and the result is a sense of relief. This creates a sense of movement; probably intended to illicit the disease sufferer who comes into contact with the ad to move toward the light and hope on the right side, and, ultimately, treatment.

As illustrated above, the CAMH's ad is moving and might even move some to seek treatment, but it is unlikely that it will move people to specifically seek treatment at CAMH as CAMH does little to promote its own facilities, methods, and successes. At the bottom of each side of the ad, in white letters set against orange, is the statement, "CAMH creates hope by providing care for thousands of people with alcoholism every year." A similar statement is written next to the CAMH logo and reads, "Canada's Leading Hospital for Mental Health." These are the only mentions of the hospital and their services. These declarations of efficacy are intended to appeal to the ethos of the reader. However, the intensity and effectiveness of the image and prose above them not only overshadow these attempts at ethos but also highlight the lack of logos used to support these claims. It seems as though the organization is relying on their ethos as a prominent Canadian Health service alone to garner new clients.

Ultimately, the ad succeeds in forwarding a message of recovery, even ending with the 12-Step motto, "One day at a time," but fails to promote the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. As a public health reminder the ad is powerful and direct. The center however finds itself under-represented by low-key name placement and recognition, which may, or may not, be a problem, depending on intent. If the intent of the campaign is to lead those who suffer from addiction to get help, the ad successfully functions on both the psychological and aesthetic level. However, if the intent of the ad is to encourage those "1,500,000 people" who suffer from alcoholism in Canada to seek treatment at the Canadian Addiction and Mental Health Center, #epicfail.