RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN
ALCOHOLISM

VOLUME 18
RESEARCH ON ALCOHOLICS
ANONYMOUS AND SPIRITUALITY
IN ADDICTION RECOVERY
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN

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An Official Publication of the American Society of Addiction Medicine
and the Research Society on Alcoholism.
This series was founded by the National Council on Alcoholism.
VOLUME 18
RESEARCH ON ALCOHOLICS
ANONYMOUS AND SPIRITUALITY
IN ADDICTION RECOVERY

The Twelve-Step Program Model
Spiritually Oriented Recovery
Twelve-Step Membership
Effectiveness and Outcome Research

Springer
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Recent Developments in Alcoholism has been an important contribution to the literature in Addiction Medicine for almost two decades. It is a bit ironic that this year’s anthology addresses not one of the recent “new” things in recovery, but one of the oldest: the ability of active participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and other related peer-assisted recovery activities to help initiate or sustain recovery. It is not “new” that AA, NA, Al-anon and the like are available in communities around America and around the world or that thousands if not millions of persons in recovery have attributed to AA a major role in their recoveries. And it is not “new” that AA is, indeed, not “professional help” and should never be considered “treatment” by any patient, family member, public policy maker, insurance company or managed care utilization reviewer. What is a recent development is that it is no longer appropriate to say “there is no evidence about what AA is or how helpful it may be” or that “evidence-based medicine includes pharmacotherapies and specific professional counseling interventions as reported through randomized clinical trials, but it excludes peer-assisted recovery activities.” The R. Brinkley Smithers Distinguished Scientist Award granted at the ASAM Medical Scientific Conference in 2007 honored the work of one of the co-editors of this volume, Lee Ann Kaskutas, Dr.P.H., of the School of Public Health of the University of California-Berkeley, examining effectiveness literature on AA and the role of spirituality in addiction and recovery.

Much of health care is showing increasing interest in not only the bio-psycho-social aspects of many health conditions, but the role of spirituality in recovery from illness. The addiction field can lead the way for the rest of medicine in uncovering insights about this essential aspect of human

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experience. This volume includes important articles by Dr. Kaskutas and many other academicians to expand our knowledge base and to serve as an important compilation of contemporary thought and data. Related topics, such as the role of mindfulness meditation in recovery, are also addressed. As scientists such as Richard Davidson, Ph.D. of the University of Wisconsin HealthEmotions Research Institute, learn more about the neurobiology of emotion and the neurophysiologic changes that occur with meditation, we get closer to understanding the neurobiology of recovery itself, which will likely be shown through neuroimaging studies to be affected by peer-assisted activities and other “self-help” activities such as participation in 12-step groups.

Michael M. Miller, M.D., FASAM, FAPA
Preface II

From the President of the Research Society on Alcoholism

This volume of the Recent Developments in Alcoholism series “Research on Alcoholics Anonymous and Spirituality in Recovery” is an important and unique contribution to our scientific understanding of recovery from alcoholism. In essence, the body of work contained here frames an overall question of how the twelve-step process established by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) intersects with spiritual beliefs to establish abstinence and guide recovery with little professional input. The scientific debate over AA and twelve-step programs has evolved from whether they are effective for individuals that utilize them to why they are effective and how to improve participation. This includes a detailed look at special populations and the self-selection bias reflected in a voluntary organization. The first four chapters address who participates in AA and how to make improvements in the participation of twelve-step programs. For individuals that “work” twelve-step programs, there appears to be increases in the spiritual growth and improvements in psychosocial functioning. Several chapters, beginning with Chapter 5, define spiritual experiences and the impact of spirituality on recovery and rehabilitation from many psychiatric disorders, including alcoholism. An expanded definition of spirituality includes meditative practices and this lends itself to experimental designs that address effectiveness. The “core spiritual beliefs” of AA and the explicit steps in enhancing spirituality are defined and examined. Chapters are devoted to understanding the role of spiritual growth through building a community by helping other alcoholics and participating in self-government. Several authors make the distinction that AA is more than a twelve-step approach to attaining sobriety. Nevertheless, it is also clear that the twelve-step program of AA sets a prototype “road to recovery” for many other addictions. Also included is how the research questions that address the effectiveness of AA and the role of spirituality are framed by historical perspectives, a lesson for how this volume will be received decades from now.
The scope and depth of this volume will undoubtedly make it an important reference for the practicing physician and scientists interested in improving recovery from alcoholism or other addictions.

Kathleen Grant, Ph.D.
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