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Main content

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Abstract: Alcoholics Anonymous, with its steady but nonspecific promotion of belief in a higher power and its emphasis on the group process, long held a near-monopoly in the outpatient alcohol recovery field, but its hegemony has now been challenged by two very different perspectives. The first is a nonspiritual approach that emphasizes the individual's capability to find a personal pathway to sobriety, exemplified by Rational Recovery. The second is a faith-based method, built on a religious understanding of alcoholism, of which Celebrate Recovery is a prominent example, based upon Christianity. Most communities offer a variety of approaches, so clinicians who are aware of these differences are in a good position to help patients make intelligent choices among the competing recovery philosophies.

Key Words: alcoholism, Alcoholics Anonymous, spirituality, religion, self-help groups

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is widely accepted as a model for alcohol treatment. However, the emphasis of the AA program on the importance of a higher power in recovery from alcoholism has led to controversy and a proliferation of programs with competing ideologies with regard to religion and spirituality. The philosophical spectrum of self-help programs now includes, in addition to AA, approaches that are nonspiritual, as well as others that are rooted in a specific religious tradition. Clinicians can help patients identify a treatment program that matches the patient's preferences with regard to religion and spirituality as part of the recovery program.

Spirituality Versus Religiosity

Spirituality is a broader term than religiosity, as a person can be spiritual but not religious (Table 1). Religion is defined as an organized practice of a belief in a power greater than oneself. (1,2) Religiosity is the extent to which an individual engages in the rituals of this commitment. Some people are spiritual but not religious; they may express their personal spiritual concept of a higher power through nature, music, art, or a quest for scientific truth, instead of through a specific religion. (3,4)

A Spiritual Approach

Spiritual alcohol recovery movements aim to provide relief from disease as a complement to traditional medicine, and attribute their success to transcendent sources. (5,6) The most well-known spiritual approach to alcohol recovery is AA. Two former alcoholics, Bill W., a New York stockbroker, and Dr. Bob, a surgeon, established AA in 1935 in Akron, Ohio. (7) Bill W. and AA published the Big Book in 1939 and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in 1952. AA has now grown to over 50,000 groups and 1,000,000 members. (7)

The philosophy of AA is belief in divine intervention and reliance on a higher power to maintain sobriety. AA is a spiritual program but not a religious one because its members define "God as they understand Him." (8,9) Members are encouraged to develop an individual relationship with their higher power. (2) Since Twelve Step programs do not require participants to accept an exclusive definition of a deity, it is adaptable to different cultures and faiths. (10) God and the higher power are open to individual interpretation regardless of religious background. (11)...

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Spiritual issues and forgiveness are oft-neglected topics in treatment programs for substance abusers. This unique book brings those underrated components of recovery to the forefront through current research, case studies, and the insight of experts in the field of spirituality as well as drug/alcohol treatment. It illustrates the important interrelationship among religiousness, spirituality, forgiveness, and alcohol and drug use and abuse throughout the lifespan. Start your review of Spirituality and Religiousness and Alcohol/Other Drug Problems: Treatment and Recovery Perspectives. Write a review. S.K. Luangamba rated it really liked it Feb 06, 2019. Osterwald Rathbone & Partners have a wealth of capabilities and experience in the oil, gas, chemical & finance sectors, developed through years of working in or with companies, lawyers or governments in these industries. Our expertise in action can be followed in depth in the following brochures. Our extensive case studies show our range of engagements in various sectors around the world.