

# A Primer on Peer Helpers and Addiction

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# Born in the house of medicine...

- Geriatrics
- Pediatrics
- Oncology
- Cardiology

...But not addiction medicine

# The three historical parents of addiction treatment

- The criminal justice system
- The social welfare system
- Mutual help fellowships

# Addiction self-help organizations are an international phenomenon

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- Austria: Blue Cross
- France: Vie Libre
- Hong Kong: SAARDA
- Japan: Danshukai
- Poland: Abstainer's Clubs
- Sweden: The Links
- Iran: Narcotics Anonymous

# Alcoholics Anonymous

- Founded in Midwestern U.S. in 1935
- Sole purpose: To help “alcoholics” become sober
- Offers meetings, sponsorship, literature
- “Disease” model
- Explosive growth in U.S. and world

And profoundly influenced the U.S.  
approach to addiction because

- They were interested, and medical professionals mostly weren't
- The drug counselling profession as an example

# Veterans Affairs RCT on AA/NA referral for outpatients

- 345 VA outpatients randomized to standard or intensive 12-step group referral
- 81.4% FU at 6 months
- Higher rates of 12-step involvement in intensive condition
- 60%+ greater improvement in outcomes in intensive referral condition



Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

## Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder (Review)

Kelly JF, Humphreys K, Ferri M

Kelly JF, Humphreys K, Ferri M.  
Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder.  
*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2020, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD012880.  
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[www.cochranelibrary.com](http://www.cochranelibrary.com)

Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step programs for alcohol use disorder (Review)  
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# Cochrane Systematic Review on AA/TSF (2020)

- Kelly, JF
- Humphreys, K
- Ferri, M

## Included Studies (n participants)

- A total of 27 primary studies containing N=10,565 participants were included (21 RCTs/quasi-RCTs, 5 non-randomized, and 1 purely economic study) that reported follow-up results across 36 reports.

# AA/TSF Findings Summary



For alcohol-related outcomes other than complete abstinence, AA and professionally-delivered TSF interventions are at least as effective as other well-established



For abstinence outcomes, AA and TSF interventions are as effective or better than other well-established treatments.



Implementing AA and TSF also appear to produce substantial health care cost savings.



Mediational analyses demonstrate clinically delivered TSF produces its benefits largely through its ability to foster increased AA participation during and, importantly, following the

# Some other important outcomes in the literature

- Reduced depression
- Less anxiety
- Greater meaning in life
- Stronger intimate relationships

No one should be surprised



# Peer helping today is **not** just about 12-step

- Sponsorship, outreach from 12-step fellowships already exists
- Peer helpers in SUD health care support many pathways to recovery
- 12-step involvement is not required for peer helpers, nor is it the measure of its effectiveness

# Integration with health care today

- More than a thousand peer helpers a core part of VA mental health/SUD care
- Covered in Medicaid in some states
- SAPT Block Grant reforms provide support

*Over to our expert panel...*