Recovery Programs

People who are addicted to drugs and alcohol can take a number of paths to recovery. Some programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous, have a history dating back decades. Others, like Rational Recovery or some of the newer medications, are still being tested.

Detoxification

Because sudden withdrawal from alcohol and drugs can be painful or even fatal, detoxification in a supervised medical setting is usually the first step in many recovery programs. Under a doctor's care, the patient is weaned from the addictive substance over a few days. The physician sometimes prescribes medications to ease the physical discomfort, hallucinations and DTs (delirium tremens, a frightening combination of shaking, convulsions and hallucinations that can accompany the first few days of withdrawal).

Detox programs are often brief, usually just a few days in length. Usually the detox program introduces the patient to individual and group therapy and strongly recommends that the patient attend 12-step meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA).

Once the patient has been successfully detoxified, the patient is discharged to begin the next phase of recovery.

Intensive Outpatient Treatment

Fifteen years ago, it was not uncommon for a patient discharged from detox to begin an inpatient program lasting from 14 to 28 days. Since the advent of managed care, inpatient programs have become much less common; typically, patients must pay for them with private funds. Intensive outpatient treatment is the more common and less costly treatment alternative.

Intensive outpatient treatment is important because it is in the community, not the hospital, where the patients will face their challenges, triggers and temptations. Studies have shown that the frequency and length of treatment are more crucial to success than where the treatment takes place. It makes sense that treatment for addiction should take place in the atmosphere in which the patient actually lives.

Intensive outpatient treatment also can be convenient for women with young children, who can work on their sobriety without worrying about finding child care or being away from their children. Intensive outpatient treatment usually lasts a couple of weeks, though a patient may continue in group or individual therapy after that. Programs usually consist of daily group therapy, 12-step meetings and individual therapy. A recovering addict going from detox to an intensive outpatient program should have a promising and sober future.

Twelve-step Programs

Although there are many challenges to their success rates and methodology, 12-step programs have helped more patients in recovery than any other approach. These programs rely on the non-professional peer support of other recovering addicts in an atmosphere of anonymity and fellowship.

Followers of 12-step programs (which also exist for gambling addicts, sex addicts, compulsive overeaters and others) believe that they are powerless over their addictions. Addicts progress through a series of 12 steps to recovery with the support of other members and, for most, the support of a sponsor as well. Though not affiliated with any formal religion, recovering patients turn their addiction over to a higher power, as they believe they are not able to successfully battle addiction through individual willpower alone.

AA recommends that a patient attend at least one meeting a day during the first few months of recovery and be willing to reach out to other members when the urge to drink arises. Reading materials produced by the program, such as The Big Book, supplement the support received in meetings. There are several different types of meetings including:

- Open speaker meetings. These meetings feature a talk by a member who has extensive experience in recovery. They are open to the public.
- Closed speaker meetings. For alcoholics and addicts only.
- Newcomers meetings. Especially for those in the early days of recovery.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.
Step and discussion meetings. These meetings are more interactive and may feature a discussion focused on a particular one of the 12 steps. Often a member waits until he or she has been sober for a while before venturing into the discussion meeting.

A member sometimes finds a favorite group or two to attend regularly but is free to attend any meeting in his or her community. Twelve-step members view recovery as a lifelong process and do not think an addict is ever cured of the addiction.

Other Recovery Programs
Even AA proponents admit that they reach only one alcoholic in 32. That leaves a lot of room for other approaches, including but not limited to:

- Rational Recovery (RR). Members often are drawn to this relatively new program because they have difficulty with or reject what they see as the spiritual emphasis of AA and NA. In fact, RR is very anti-AA in its literature. Unlike 12-step members, RR members usually attend one or two meetings a week for a year and then consider themselves cured of their addictions. The components of RR are outlined in the book Rational Recovery from Alcoholism: The Small Book, available through the organization. Like AA, the goal of RR is abstinence from alcohol.
- Women for Sobriety (WFS). Women face unique issues in recovery. The majority of AA members are male. WFS was founded to give women a support system particular to their needs. Rather than the AA greeting, “Hello, I’m Joan, and I’m an alcoholic,” WFS open their talks with “My name is Joan, and I am a competent woman.” Many women attend both WFS and AA meetings as part of their recovery program.
- Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS). Like AA and RR, the goal of SOS is abstinence. This organization uses six guidelines for living sober and is similar to AA without the talk of a higher power.

Therapeutic Communities and Group Homes
Sometimes a return to the community, family or work environment where the addicted person was using is not a good idea. Often the support of AA and therapy do not provide the constant structure needed for successful recovery. Therapeutic communities (TCs) and group homes offer structured, supervised environments in which individuals can slowly develop or regain work, personal and social skills as they build solid foundations in sobriety.

Because these programs are not medically based, they usually are not covered by private health insurance. Of course it never hurts to ask. Often, group homes and TCs are supported by the state government through the department of addictions. Rules for acceptance vary, but usually an individual needs to have completed a detoxification program and maintained sobriety for a certain amount of time to enter. There also may be rules around mandatory attendance at AA meetings, employment or employment training.

Resources
For more information, contact your employee-assistance program (EAP) or the following organizations:

- Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org
- Narcotics Anonymous: www.na.org
- Women For Sobriety: www.womenforsobriety.org
- Rational Recovery: www.rational.org
- Secular Organizations for Sobriety: www.sossobriety.org

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