

President's Column

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National Institute on Drug Abuse Recognizes SMART Recovery[®]

In October, 1999, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the US government agency responsible for research on drug abuse treatment, released a landmark document, the *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide*. This document is noteworthy for SMART Recovery[®] in several ways.

The 13 Principles of Treatment are printed on the first three pages (and listed below). These Principles are entirely consistent with SMART Recovery[®]'s approach. In particular Principles 1, 3, 6, and 8 reinforce statements made in our own literature. We do not think that our groups are for everyone (#1). We attempt to help our members deal with the other significant issues in their lives, because we assume these are related to addictive behavior (#3, #8). We use some of the same techniques that are used in behavioral therapy (#6).

On pages 20–21 of this document (which is 54 pages in all), the 9th question (and answer) under Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is: "Where do 12-Step programs or self-help programs fit into drug abuse treatment? Self-help groups can complement and extend the effects of professional treatment. The most prominent self-help groups are those affiliated with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Cocaine Anonymous (CA), all of which are based on the 12-Step model, and Smart Recovery [with luck the next edition will get SMART Recovery[®] spelled correctly!]. Most drug addiction treatment programs encourage patients to participate in a self-help group during and after formal treatment."

This FAQ paragraph is the only significant mention of 12-Step groups in this document. Unlike what one would typically hear if one called a US treatment center (an over-emphasis on 12-Step attendance), this document is clearly focused on treatment as necessary for recovery and support group attendance as an adjunct to treatment. In cases of substantial or severe addiction, of course, this would be the normally desirable scenario. However, just publishing the 13 Principles will probably have only a small impact on the overemphasis on 12-Step group attendance in the US. What would be required to have a big impact is a topic for another column!

Another remarkable aspect of this document is that it does not emphasize addiction as a disease. Addiction is even referred to as a complex illness and a complex disorder. The focus is solidly on the behavioral treatments that are known to work, and these treatments are consistent with SMART Recovery[®].

This document, which focuses on substances of abuse other than alcohol, can serve as a companion to the *Handbook of Alcoholism Treatment: Effective Alternatives*, edited by Hester & Miller (Allyn & Bacon, 1995). The Handbook summarizes the randomized controlled clinical trials of treatments for alcohol problems and provides strong indirect support for the SMART Recovery[®] approach. Perhaps someday there will be a book that reviews the research on treatment of activity addictions (where effective treatments are similar to those for alcohol and drug problems) or one book that reviews the research on all addictive behavior. These books would also provide strong indirect support for SMART Recovery[®], because SMART Recovery[®] has been a program based on proven techniques, not one seeking validation from research after its creation.

The *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment* will provide a strong reference for SMART Recovery[®] (in those cases where individuals are actually open to listening to the research evidence). In the meantime we need to continue, locally and nationally, to get SMART Recovery[®] listed everywhere any other support group is listed. Our listing in these Principles should help that effort. When that effort is complete, perhaps not until years from now, many more individuals will easily find out about SMART Recovery[®] and be in a position to choose a support group knowing that SMART Recovery[®] is an option.

NIDA turned 25 in September, 1999. NIDA's existence is an example of tax dollars well spent. The research NIDA supports sets the standards for substance abuse treatment, and this research is gaining increasing visibility. The *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment* (NIH Publication 99-4180) is available at www.nida.nih.gov or through the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 800-729-6686 (800-SAY-NO-TO). A good first step for each of us is to obtain copies and provide them to interested individuals in our local communities.