

# SCIENTIFIC PROOF OF SMART'S EFFECTIVENESS

SMART states that “our efforts are based on scientific knowledge and evolve as scientific knowledge evolves.” Have we lived up to this claim?

SMART meetings exist at the intersection of scientific knowledge about addictive problems and their treatment, what is self-empowering, and what is helpful in a mutual help group. We started with ideas and tools from CBT (cognitive behavioral treatment) and later included motivational interviewing and mindfulness. All three approaches have significant scientific support. So far, so good: both science and evolution.

Direct and specific evidence of “based on scientific knowledge” has been emerging as SMART itself is being studied:

**2000 – Penn and Brooks**<sup>1</sup> conducted a five-year study using an REBT approach very similar to SMART, with a chronically mentally ill population. They found no difference in outcomes between this approach and a 12-step approach.

**2007 – Atkins and Hawdon**<sup>2</sup> found that across several mutual help groups, including SMART, outcomes were similar.

**2016 – Blatch and colleagues**<sup>3</sup>, in a very large study involving nearly 6,000 inmates in the Australian prison system, found that involvement with the SMART approach substantially reduced re-conviction rates, compared with inmates not exposed to SMART but receiving other support (See InsideOut article page 28).

**2018 – Zemore and colleagues**<sup>4</sup> published the most significant finding to date, that participants in AA, SMART, Women for Sobriety and LifeRing, followed for a year, did comparably well in meeting their recovery goals.

Replicating Zemore’s finding is needed; however, these studies collectively present good evidence that SMART is equally effective to other mutual help groups.

So far, SMART is living up to its scientific ideal!

*(1) Penn, P. E., & Brooks, A. J. (2000). Five years, twelve steps, and REBT in the treatment of dual diagnosis. Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive-Behavior Therapy, 18(4), 197-208. (2) Atkins, R. G., & Hawdon, J. E. (2007). Religiosity and participation in mutual-aid support groups for addiction. Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 33: 321-31. (3) Blatch, C., O'Sullivan, K., Delaney, J.J., & Rathbone, D. (2016). Getting SMART, SMART Recovery programs and reoffending. Journal of Forensic Practice, 18(1), 3-16. (4) Zemore, S.E., Lui, C.K., Mericle, A., Hemberg, J., Kaskutas, L.A. (2018). A longitudinal study of the comparative efficacy of Women for Sobriety, LifeRing, SMART Recovery, and 12-step groups for those with AUD. Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 88, 18-26.*