



## **How effective are mutual help groups for addictive problems?**

**With Tom Horvath, Ph.D., ABPP**

**Live Webinar: Friday Oct 28, 2022 9:00-10:30AM PDT**

### **Webinar objectives:**

- 1) Recall that AA and professional treatment (including CBT) appear to be equally effective for treating alcohol use disorder.
- 2) Recall that AA and several other mutual help groups appear to be equally effective.
- 3) Recall that mutual help groups appear to operate by the same underlying set of mechanisms, regardless of surface differences.

### **Overview:**

AA is well established as being equally effective to professional treatment (including well-implemented CBT) for alcohol use disorder, especially for long-term abstinence outcomes. Several studies suggest that other mutual help groups (including SMART Recovery, LifeRing, and Women for Sobriety) are equally effective to AA. Two large studies comparing these groups are in process. Emerging evidence suggests that all mutual help groups work by similar mechanisms. The five primary mechanisms appear to be increased confidence, bonding and connection with others, increased coping ability, the opportunity to give back, and learning about a new way of living without substance use. Older evidence suggests that a wide range of psychotherapies for alcohol problems are equally effective, and that there are probably similar mechanisms of action across different psychotherapies. Collectively, these findings suggest that there are only a few mechanisms of change working across both mutual help and psychotherapy. The clinical implications are that clients can be encouraged to attend the mutual help group of their choice, that not attending any group should be acceptable, and that presenting surface differences between groups may persuade a client to investigate one group even if another group is not of interest. Participants will be better able to accept and address a client's refusal to attend mutual help, or to attend a specific mutual help group, so that the therapeutic relationship need not become strained over conflicts about mutual help group attendance. Presentation will also inform participants about the range of mutual help groups available, about how to summarize these groups to clients, and how to encourage client exploration of the groups available to them.

### **About the Presenter:**

**Tom Horvath, Ph.D., ABPP**



Dr. Horvath is a California licensed (PSY7732) and board certified clinical psychologist. He has specialized in addictive problems since 1985. He is the founder and president of Practical Recovery Psychology Group in San Diego, past president of the American Psychological Association (APA)'s Society of Addiction Psychology (Division 50; the world's largest organization of addiction psychologists), and author of *Sex, Drugs, Gambling & Chocolate: A Workbook for Overcoming Addictions*, recommended as a self-help book by the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT). He has been an instructor of graduate addiction courses at Alliant International University and the University of San Diego. For 20 years he was the volunteer president of SMART Recovery (established 1994), an international non-profit offering free, self-empowering mutual help groups for addictive problems. He continues to serve on SMART's US board of directors, and the Global Research Advisory Council of SMART Recovery International. He was the 2022 recipient of APA Division 50's award for Distinguished Career Contributions to Public Interest. The citation stated that he is "a leading force in SMART, promoting growth, international expansion, and aligning the organization's values with evolving addiction science." He is a fellow of the San Diego Psychological Association, ABCT, and APA. He regularly presents to professionals on the self-empowering approach, addiction treatment, and mutual help.

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### **Discussant: Dr. Greg Stanford**

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