NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND THE 12 STEPS: RECLAIMING A Viable RECOVERY OPTION FOR ADOLESCENTS
Challenges to 12 Step Recovery
History of 12 Step Recovery
Overview of the 12 Steps
Alternatives to 12 Steps
Adolescent neurodevelopment
Research on efficacy of 12 Step
Integrated Approach
Experiential Neuropsychological Education
An effective approach to an integrated model
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

Efficacy of alternatives
Difficulty of buy-in among adolescents
Resistance to the spiritual component
Lack of efficacy of 12-Step
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

12-step programs...
...do not work and are not backed by science
...do not foster access to care
...are no better than doing nothing
...are no more than “religious efforts that reinforce powerless and helplessness”
...Genetics do not play a role in addictions. They are not diseases.
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

12-step programs...

...do not work and are not backed by science

There is overwhelming evidence that AA and programs that facilitate patients’ engagement within groups are among the most effective and best-studied treatments for addictive behavior change.

-Kelly and Beresin, 2014
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

12-step programs...

...do not foster access to care

...AA is free, and can be accessed almost anywhere and at any time in the United States and many other countries...notably at high-risk relapse times when professionals are not available....

-Kelly and Beresin, 2014
12-step programs...

...are no better than doing nothing

Evidence shows that 12-step programs foster a safe community and sound principles that promote abstinence, and taking responsibility for additional efforts that might be needed.

-Kelly and Beresin, 2014
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

12-step programs...

...are no more than “religious efforts that reinforce powerless and helplessness”

The truth is that in the midst of an addiction, one has, in fact, lost control over impulses to use the drug. Admitting one is ‘powerless’ is merely facing a fact of his/her life that is a part of the neurobiology of the illness, and which ultimately leads to one taking responsibility to his/her recovery. Many attending 12-step programs do not perceive a need for God, and do not accept the interpretation of a “higher power.”

-Kelley and Beresin, 2014
12 STEP: WHY NOT?

Genetics do not play a role in addictions. They are not diseases.

This assertion also contradicts scientific evidence; research demonstrates that about half of the risk for addiction is conferred by genetics.

-Kelley and Beresin, 2014
What can we do to prevent the scourge of addiction? Surely we all want a magic bullet. But, we also want care that is based on sound scientific research and evidence-based treatments. There are no cures. But, there is hope for recovery and sobriety, and, while not being cure-alls themselves, research demonstrates that AA and 12-step treatments are some of the most effective and cost-efficient approaches to addressing chronic diseases of addiction in our society.

John F. Kelly, PhD

Gene Beresin, MD
## Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBT</td>
<td>Celebrate Recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>Self Help Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBRP</td>
<td>Women for Sobriety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm Reduction</td>
<td>Men for Sobriety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Organization for Sobriety</td>
<td>Medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LifeRing</td>
<td>The Seven Challenges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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WHY ALTERNATIVES ARE ATTRACTIVE

- Secularity
- Emphasis on Internal Control
- Evolving Approaches
- Shedding of lifelong labels
HISTORY OF 12 STEP RECOVERY

History of Alcoholics Anonymous

Synanon and its legacy

NA, and other As

The Minnesota Model, 12-Step Plus

Contemporary 12 Step

Alternative Peer Groups
THE STEPS: BASICS

Steps 1-9: Building a Foundation

1-3: From denial to making a decision to change

4-7: Gaining self-awareness

8-9: Establishing accountability and taking action to reinforce it
THE STEPS: BASICS

Steps 10-12: A Way of Life

10: Continued personal honesty
11: Accepting help in sustaining recovery
12: Helping Others
THE STEPS: BASICS

Daily structure of 10-12:
- Daily Inventory (at night)
- Establishing intention (in the morning)
- Accountability (“10th Stepping”)
- The Fellowship
ENCOURAGING BUY-IN

Prepare the student for orthodoxy, dogma and strange ideas
Break it down
Encourage critical thinking
Show them the parallels
EMPOWER
Pragmatism
Addressing spirituality
ADOLESCENT BRAIN

The world is novel and ever expanding
- Right hemisphere dominant

I know everything but, I can't focus right now.
- Over crowded pre frontal cortex

I know how to... but what is the best choice?
- Prefrontal cortex and emotional system is developed but does not have the mileage.

Peer fact checking
- Baird Experiment

I see it so I know I've done it
- Mirror neurons
AREAS OF THE BRAIN ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG USE

Reward Circuitry

- Prefrontal Cortex - Thinking, planning, mood regulation
- Ventral Tegmental Area - Identifies needs. Hunger, Thirst, ETC.
- Nucleus Accumbens - Motivation towards reward.
- Amygdala - Mood regulation and response
- Hippocampus - Memory
THE DRUG EFFECTED ADOLESCENT BRAIN

- Hyper-emotionality
- Misguided Motivation
- Brain functions directed at pleasure seeking behaviors
- Increased rationalization
- Excessive concern with self in comparison to others
- Distorted perception of individuation
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ENGAGE WITH THE STEPS

Decreasing emotional reactivity and misperception

Seeing the steps as a tool and structure for practice rather than a pass/fail curriculum.

Identifying WHY?

Aren’t the steps some arbitrary requirements made up by an old guy a long time ago?
EXPERIENTIAL NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION

- Neuropsych Education
  - How is your brain working
  - Drug Effects on the brain
  - 12 STEP effects on the brain

- Qeeg quantitative electroencephalograph
  Helps the student:
  • Understand their experience through the functional areas of the brain.
  • Objectively look at what contributes to their behaviors, decisions, and emotional states.
  • Recognize how and why drugs effected them a certain way.
  • Be more aware of why they have trouble with pieces of the 12 step process.

- Mindfulness/Guided Visualization
QEEG EXAMPLE
12 STEPS ON THE BRAIN

Steps 1-9: Building a Foundation

1-3: From denial to making a decision to change

4-7: Gaining self-awareness

8-9: Establishing accountability and taking action to reinforce it
AN INTEGRATED AND EMPOWERING APPROACH

Creating an empowering experience

Pragmatic promotion of positive peer support

Exposure vs. immersion

Promoting critical thinking (Integrating MI, ACT)

On balance, more focus on psychoeducation regarding the rewards of abstinence and recovery than on the negative consequences of substance abuse

Experiential Neurobiological Psychoeducation in parallel with The Steps
Why were you resistant to 12 step recovery?

• “AA was written by old people a long time ago so they really don’t relate to us”

How does understanding your brain help?

• “It helps to know that my brain is telling me to do things and that my impulsivity is not just my choice. It makes me pay more attention to what I do.”
REFERENCES


*Alternatives to 12-Step Addiction Recovery*, Christina Reardon, MSW, LSW *Social Work Today*, Vol 13, No. 6, P. 12


REFERENCES


