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NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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A PHYSICIAN'S VIEWPOINT ON THE NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS PROGRAM

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A Physician's Viewpoint on the Narcotics Anonymous Program and the Basic Text

The subject presented in the book of Narcotics Anonymous is of lifesaving importance to those afflicted with the disease of addiction. I say this with a background as a clinical associate professor of both medicine and psychiatry with two years of formal training in addiction. As one of a new breed of medical specialists known as "addictionologists", I have a real sense of satisfaction and regard in being asked to comment on the book of Narcotics Anonymous, a blueprint of recovery for the addict.

Six years ago, I attended my first meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. Three years later I sat on the floor of a small house in another N.A. meeting. I quickly recognized that in this meeting there was a need that this largely young group of addicts was responding to. Now, I have an in-depth knowledge of the Twelve Step Recovery Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Recently, when one of the originators of the literature movement in N.A. suggested that I might write a comment on the N.A. book, from a medical specialist's standpoint, I was both flattered and humbled.

Since that first meeting, I have cared for many addicts, those suffering from addiction to narcotics, sedatives, stimulants, hallucinogenic drugs and alcohol.

It is now apparent that these individuals are not weak-willed, ignorant, lacking guts or willpower, nor are they bad or evil. They are certainly not crazy and most have no primary psychiatric disease. They do, however, suffer from a psychosocialbiochemical-genetic disease called addiction. As an addictionologist, with training in both medicine and psychiatry, I have watched and participated in many forms of treatment. It is now an established truth that the self-help group of Narcotics Anonymous is the single most effective tool we have for recovery from the disease of drug addiction.

Through both clinical and laboratory research, more knowledge and information has been acquired in the last seven years than in the last seven thousand years. While it is apparent that many individuals suffering from addiction will need hospitalization for detoxification, critical to recovery is the understanding, acceptance, and practice of the Narcotics Anonymous program. As I have observed N.A. through the years, an increasing number of adolescents and adults have achieved cleanliness through regular and long-term attendance at Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Therefore, I now appreciate N.A. and its value as a recovery program, also as an integral part of any treatment program.

There are many stories of recovery in the book which are

similar to those I have witnessed and played a part in. A pattern runs through each of the "miracles of recovery" that are documented in these pages. First, the individuals recognized they were ill, sick, and needed help. Then through the precepts and teachings of Narcotics Anonymous, they recognized the need for a moral inventory and an acknowledgement of their faults, and weakness in their personality structure. Following was the requirement to make amends to those they have harmed, either psychologically or physically. Then, appreciating that the best way to keep their cleanliness and recovery was to give it away, they embarked on a life of helping others. Invariably in those who achieved cleanliness and serenity, this was accompanied by a feeling that they could no longer do this by themselves; that they needed a power outside themselves. Many called it God as they understood Him, others, a power greater than themselves, the group conscience, some combined them both. All agreed they could no longer use mood-changing, mind-altering drugs and that they couldn't get well by themselves.

As the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous has grown, so has the need for a primer, a guideline, a recovery map for the disease of addiction. I have witnessed a segment of the effort made. A dedicated, unselfish group of N.A. members entirely without financial profit motive have banded with other members

throughout the world to write this book. It is needed. Indeed it is critical reading for those who wish to recover, using the guidelines of N.A.

Current medical and scientific evidence indicates that addiction to any and all drugs is a disease, a biochemical-genetic disorder. No longer does the addict have to harbor shame, embarrassment or guilt, nor do they have to suffer the ignorant scorn heaped upon them by those unknowledgeable in our society. By following the steps of the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, attending N.A. meetings and talking with sponsors, the addict can learn to cope with this ignorance and prejudice. It is clearly evident that this destructive ignorance and prejudice can most effectively be handled at N.A. meetings and by the membership of Narcotics Anonymous.

Those of us who are medically trained and work with these addictive diseases are numbed by our impotence in utilizing traditional, medical and psychiatric techniques in curing people suffering and dying from addiction. Likewise, we are both impressed and humbled by witnessing the positive effects on the addicts who attend and follow the Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Just as I used to give the drug inserts from the boxes of antibiotics to my patients, I will give those patients with addiction the book of Narcotics Anonymous. To each I

will give this book and this message, "Read this carefully and repeatedly. It's a simple book, yet profound in its wisdom and examples. It's inexpensive but above all it works. Of all the scientific weapons at my disposal there is no operation, no medicine, no machine that is half as effective or with half the promise of recovery that this book possesses. Many of you initially will take this book out of compliance, and as non-believers. But read it, reflect on it, and read it again, for if you practice the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, cleanliness, serenity, peace, love and a new life await you at the end of its chapters."

G. Douglas Talbott, M.D., F.A.C.P.

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