

AN ADDICTION PSYCHIATRIST RECOMMENDS AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS

*By Jeffrey D. Roth, MD,
FASAM*


Addiction Psychiatrist,
Chicago, Illinois

Editor, *Journal of Groups
in Addiction & Recovery*

As an addiction psychiatrist, I am grateful to have Al-Anon available for my patients who have been affected by anyone's use of alcohol. I recommend Al-Anon whenever I see a patient who complains of anxiety, depression, or a variety of physical problems that are commonly worsened by close contact with the disease of alcoholism.

I do a complete family history with anyone I am treating. I specifically ask about alcohol use in grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, grandchildren, and significant others. I also ask about other diseases that often thinly veil alcoholism, such as cirrhosis, pancreatitis, or other medical consequences of alcoholism, since the patient and the family frequently deny the alcoholism.

I do not insist that the patient or I make a clear connection between the patient's complaints and the presence of alcoholism. I suggest the patient use Al-Anon as part of the diagnostic process and I use the familiar recommendation that the person may decide after attending six meetings whether the program



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seems to be useful. Frequently the most useful information emerges from the patient's reactions to the Al-Anon meetings. A feeling of not belonging is usually connected to the sense of estrangement that is common among alcoholic families. If the patient felt burdened by listening to others at a meeting, it is a telltale sign that this person assumes overwhelming responsibility for someone else's behavior.

I have seen incredible progress among my patients who use Al-Anon as part of their recovery process. A newfound sense of well-being, the ability to participate fully in intimate relationships, and an improved quality of work and satisfaction in a career are evidence of growth and change. I have also witnessed patients who start their recovery in Al-Anon and expand their recovery to include other areas of their life. I've also seen patients who are recovering from other difficulties, including their own alcoholism, enhance their progress by participating in Al-Anon.

As a physician, I know of no other prescription with such magnificent benefits, with so few side effects, without any required cost. Al-Anon is available almost anywhere in the world and with the advent of on-line Al-Anon meetings through the Internet. One other selfish benefit to the professional who refers patients to Al-Anon: we learn a tremendous amount of information that is useful to us from the patients who go!

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