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## **AIRWAY OBSTRUCTIONS (EMPHYSEMA, CHRONIC BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA)**

- High risk male and female patients with chronic airway obstructions (emphysema, chronic bronchitis, or asthma) who participated in a self-group were less likely to be hospitalized (20% vs 64%) and to be hospitalized for shorter periods of time (0.8 days vs 5 days) than other high-risk patients who were in a wait list control condition. The study followed 31 high-risk patients, whose median age was 64, for a six-month period. Ten high-risk patients were randomly assigned to each of three conditions: a lay-led self-help support club, a professionally-led educational rehabilitation group, and a wait list control condition. (Jensen, 1983).

## **BEREAVEMENT**

- Bereaved parents who participated in Compassionate Friends (CP), a group for parents who have lost children, felt they had been helped by their involvement. In comparison to relatively inactive members and parents who declined invitations to join CP, the most active participants experienced significantly more personal growth, especially in the areas of greater sense of personal strength and resiliency. They also felt they gained an increased sense of the value of human life. The findings were based on the analysis of two survey questionnaires mailed at a one-year time interval. One hundred ninety-four parents responded. (Videka-Sherman, L., 1982).

## **CANCER**

- Women with metastasized breast cancer who participated in a weekly 90-minute support group for one year survived 1-1/2 years longer (on average) than comparable women who received ongoing medical treatment only. These findings are based on an analysis of survival time, at 10 year follow-up, of the 50 women who were assigned to the support group and the 36 who were assigned to the control group. A psychiatrist or social worker, and a therapist who had breast cancer in remission co-led the group. The content of the group included discussions of how to cope with cancer, expressions of feelings about cancer, and self-hypnosis for pain. (Spiegel, Bloom, Kramer & Gottheil, 1989).

An earlier article on this intervention, based on data collected at the end of the treatment year, reported that support group participants, in comparison with control group participants had: lower mood disturbances, fewer maladaptive coping responses, and were less phobic. (Speigel, D., Bloom, J.R. & Yalom, I., 1981).

- Contrary to popular opinion, and as extensively documented by Spiegel and his colleagues (Spiegel, 1993, 1994; Spiegel et al., 1989), a recent large study disputes the role of support groups in extending the lives of women with metastatic breast cancer (Goodwin et al., 2001). The study disputes a belief that has been stated so often it is almost considered a truism that the mind influences the course of advanced cancer so powerfully that patients can hold off death by getting emotional support in a group. The investigators began their study because they were concerned/assumed that many patients felt obligated to join support groups, whether they wanted to or not, to fight their cancer. Spiegel's original findings have been suspected because the study was small and inconclusive. Goodwin et al recruited 235 women with advanced breast cancer, assigning 158 to attend support groups and 77 not to attend the groups, for comparison. Those assigned to support groups had a median survival time of 17.9 months. Those who did not go to the groups had a median survival time of 17.6 months, an

insignificant difference.

For those who do seek groups, Dr. Goodwin added, there can be real benefits. In her study, those in the groups said they felt better and had better control of their pain, trading information and advice, and giving each other concrete, practical help. The Lancet medical journal asked Spiegel to assess the research that disputed his earlier findings. Dr. Spiegel (2001) agreed that the Canadian study was well designed and well conducted, and that it clearly provides no support for the theory that group support prolongs survival time. In an editorial, he wrote that it might be impossible to replicate his findings because women with breast cancer today aren't as emotionally isolated as they were in the 70s. Advances in treatment may also have played a part in the difference. However, he contends that it's not the last word. Others say they would be very surprised if new studies overturn the Canadian group's conclusions. Some breast cancer experts, like Dr. Marc Lippman of the University of Michigan, say they were not at all surprised by the Canadian researchers' result because it makes so much sense. Advanced cancer is such an assault on the body that it would be incredible if the groups had such a life-prolonging effect, Dr. Lippman said. "I was more astonished by the original Spiegel observation," he said (Kolata, 2001).

The study, did however, corroborate Spiegel's finding that groups had psychological benefits and could be prescribed for psychological benefit and not any prolongation of life. He wrote, "curing cancer may not be a question of mind over matter, but mind does matter" (Spiegel, 2001, p.1768). Goodwin believes these results will free women of fear that if they don't participate in these types of therapies they are hurting their chances of survival.

- Women who had undergone mastectomy operations and who participated in Reach-To-Recovery's visitor program found the visits very helpful. Participants who were visited by a Reach-To-Recovery member returned to normal activities earlier than similar others. The findings were based on personal interviews with 652 women. (Rogers, T.F., Bauman, L.J. & Metzger, L., 1985).
- Male and female cancer patients who were undergoing or had completed lengthy cancer therapy and who joined TOUCH, a self-help group which includes training to help similar others, reported that they benefited significantly in terms of their knowledge of cancer, their ability to talk with people, their friendships and family life, and their coping with cancer. One-hundred thirty-nine people (70% response rate) who were active in seven different groups responded. (Maisiak, R., Cain, M., Yarbrow, C.H. & Josof, L., 1981)
- People participating in a self-help group for laryngectomized cancer patients improved their communication abilities, functioned well socially, and tended not to experience serious post-surgical depression. Findings based on interviews with 60 patients. (Richardson, 1980).

## CAREGIVERS

- Women who were caregivers to frail elderly parents, and who participated in peer-led (N=34) or professionally led (N=36) support groups for 8 weekly, 2 hour sessions reported significant improvements in their competence as caregivers. In comparison with comparable caregivers in a control group (N=36), women in both group interventions also reported increased social network size and knowledge of formal community resources. No differences were reported in emotional well being, or in level of burden. Most of the participants were employed (67%), middle-aged (average age of 50), and Caucasian (95%); half of the care recipients were living at home.

(Toseland, Rossiter & Labrecque, 1989).

## **COST-EFFECTIVENESS**

- "Self-Help groups provide a cost-effective complement to professional health services. They have been shown to decrease the need for hospitalization, increase positive feelings about conditions and illnesses, and enhance skills that enable individuals to enjoy a greater quality of life in their communities." (Canadian Medical Association Journal, 148 (5), March 1, 1993, p.817.).
- In a survey of mental health drop-in centres, social support services provide at consumer, peer-run centres was approximately \$250 per person per year compared to about \$500 per person per year in similar professional provider-run centres. (Kaufman, C., Ward-Sosante, Farmer, J.).

## **DIABETES**

- Men ranging in age from 57 to 82 with diabetes who participated in support groups learned self-care techniques and were less depressed, less stressed, gained more knowledge and rated the quality of their lives higher than those who didn't participate in support groups. Similar research on group benefits has already shown special values of groups for young diabetics. (Gilden, J., Hendryx, M., Clar S., Casia, C., and Singh S., 1992).

## **EMPOWERMENT**

- In a study of 55 men and women on empowerment, the researchers found that none of the participants became empowered on their own. Rather, social context and community life were critical to understanding the changes that individuals experienced over time. For example, participation for study participants meant involvement in community organizations, self-help groups and other aspects of community life. Participants in self-help groups applied their new participatory competence to ever expanding areas of their lives. (Lord, J. & Hutchinson, 1993).
- Participants in self-help groups reported that they developed skills for participation (e.g., communication, assertiveness, facilitation, organization, how to use professionals) in a safe environment that gives people the tools they need for effective participation. Simply connecting people with a common issue opens up possibilities and avenues for future creative health action. (Bayers, 1993).

## **HEALTH STATUS**

- Self-help experiences were perceived by participants to have an important positive impact on health, both their overall health and its various areas. (Warner, A., 1992).

## **HEART DISEASE**

- In August of 1993 Mutual of Omaha, the United States largest provider of individual health insurance, announced it would reimburse heart-disease patients for therapy at Dr. Dean Ornish's Preventative Medical Research Institute in Sausalito, California. Since 1977 Dr. Ornish has been using a very low-fat diet combined with exercise, meditation and support groups to treat serious heart disease. His program has been shown to achieve better results than bypass surgery or angioplasty at a fraction of the cost. Ornish credits the support groups and meditation for much of the success of his program. (Newsweek Magazine. Do Genes Determine which foods We Should Eat? August 9, 1993, p. 64.).
- The researchers in a Duke University Medical Study of 1,368 heart patients found those persons who lacked a spouse or confidant were three times as likely to die within five years of diagnosis than those who were married or had a close friend. The lead author of the study said that .."in some cases a support group may be as effective as costly medical treatment." (Duke University News, 1992).

## MENTAL HEALTH

- Members of GROW (a 12-step self-help group for people with psychiatric disabilities) with a history of chronic and severe psychiatric difficulties were hospitalized for fewer days over a 32 month period (49 days vs 134 days) following their participation than similarly disabled non-participants. Thirty-one severely disabled GROW members were matched with comparably disabled non-participants using archival data from the Illinois State Department of Mental Health. The two groups were matched on the basis of 12 variables including history of hospitalization prior to participation in GROW, and demographic data. (Kennedy, M. 1989).
- Patients discharged from a state psychiatric hospital who were randomly assigned to participate in a Community Network Development (CND) Program (N=40) required one-half as much re-hospitalization ten months after discharge, as a comparable group of non-participating ex-patients (N=40). CND ex-patients also required one-third as many patient days of re-hospitalization (7 vs 25 days). Participation in a CND network involved monthly social activities and weekly contact by a paid CND member. (Gordon, R.E., Edmunson, E.& Bedell, J., 1982).
- Men and women who participated in Recovery, Inc., a self-help program for people with a history of psychiatric problems, reported less nervousness, tension and depression since joining the group. Long-term members who were leaders reported a diminished need for professional psychotherapy and medication and were indistinguishable from a probability of community members on self-reported measures of general well-being. Respondents were 201 Recovery, Inc., group leaders who had been members for at least 7 years, 155 short-term members, and 195 control subjects who represented a probability sample from the community. (Galanter, M., 1988).
- Parents of adult sons or daughters with diagnoses of severe psychiatric disabilities changed their beliefs about the causes of their offsprings' problems and reported increased comfort in their relationships after participating in a local chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI). Comparisons of retrospective and current self-reports indicated that changes in causal beliefs were associated with participation. The changes involved stronger endorsement of the belief that biochemical illness was a primary causal factor and weaker endorsement of the belief that deficits in parenting were a primary causal factor. Parents also reported decreased conflict with their offspring. The respondents were 57 parents who were members of a local chapter of AMI. (Medvene, L.J. & Krauss, D.H., 1989).
- Participation in a self-help group for families of psychiatric patients reduced the family's sense of burden. Members found the group helpful because it provided them with information about

schizophrenia and coping strategies which professionals didn't provide. Participation also helped parents to develop supportive social bonds with others who were experiencing similar problems. Fifty-six families responded to a mailed questionnaire. (Potasznik, H. & Nelson, B., 1984).

- Children of parents with drinking problems who participated in Alateen, a self-help group sponsored by Alcoholics Anonymous, suffered less emotional and social disturbance than peers who did not belong. The findings were based on personal interviews with three groups of matched participants: adolescents with an alcoholic parent who were not members of Alateen, adolescents who were members of Alateen, and a control group of adolescents without an alcoholic parent. There were 25 adolescents in each group. (Hughes, J.M., 1977).

## **MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

- Men and women with multiple sclerosis (MS) who participated in a support group led by a registered nurse with MS felt they benefited by gaining information about MS, about how to care for themselves, and about how to recognize and deal with common aspects of their illness like forgetfulness and euphoria. (Spiegelberg, N., 1980).

## **OSTOMY**

- Male and female members of the United Ostomy Association (UOA) who participated as visitors in UOA's program were significantly more accepting of their ostomies than other members who were not visitors. Acceptance of ostomy is associated with better acceptance of the drastic life changes resulting from ostomy surgery, with better health, and with the ability to maintain social relationships. Three-hundred-and-eighteen people responded from 25 UOA chapters: 54% were visitors and 46% were non-visitors. (Trainor, M.A., 1982).

## **PARENTING**

- Parents of premature infants who participated in a support group animated by a "veteran" mother behaved significantly differently towards their infants than did a non-participating comparison group of similar others. In comparison with the control group, families which participated visited their infants significantly more often in the hospital, touched, talked, and looked at their infants significantly more often, and rated themselves as more competent infant care givers. The 28 families in the support group condition met for seven to ten weeks and were compared to 29 control families. All families were followed for three months. (Minde, K., Shosenberg, N., Marton, P., Thompson, J. & Ripley, J., 1980).
- Parents who participated in a self-help group reported that they felt more positive and less alone in their role as parents. Skill in caring for their child increased, and understanding of their child's normal growth and development improved. Ninety-eight parents responded to mailed survey questionnaires two years after the support group program had been initiated. (Kagey, J.R., Vivace, J. & Lutz, W., 1981).
- Child abusers who participated in Parents Anonymous, a self-help group for abusive parents, reported that they gained insight into their reactions to the abuse they typically experienced as children and that they learned new ways of expressing love and affection to their own children.

(Comstock, C., 1982).

- Participants in a national self-help group for parents of young drug and alcohol abusers - PRIDE (Parent Resources Institute for Drug Education) - reported that their participation was associated with improvement in their children's drug problem. A majority of the participants also reported improvements in their children's general discipline problems and in adjustment outside the home. Findings were based on the analysis of the responses of 135 parent group members to a written questionnaire. (Galanter, M.D., Gleaton, T., Marcus, C.E. & McMillen, J., 1984)

## **RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS**

- Men and women with rheumatoid arthritis who participated in a mutual support group showed greater improvements in joint tenderness than did a similar group of non-participants. A total of 105 patients were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: stress management group, mutual support group, or a no treatment group. The stress management and support groups met for ten weekly sessions and were facilitated by a psychologist. (Shearn, M.A. & Fireman, B.H., 1985).

## **SCOLIOSIS**

- Male and female adults who have undergone surgery or bracing for treatment of scoliosis and who participated in Scoliosis Peer Support groups had, in comparison with non-participating similar others: fewer psychosomatic symptoms, higher feelings of mastery, fewer feelings of shame and estrangement, higher self-esteem, a more positive outlook, and better patient-physician relationships. Survey questionnaires were gathered from 245 scoliosis club participants and 495 nonparticipants who were interested in joining. Adults who had undergone medical treatment benefited most; minimal gains were reported by other adults and adolescents with scoliosis, as well as parents of adolescents with scoliosis. (Hinrichsen, G., Revenson, T. & Shinn, 1985).

## **SKIN ULCERS**

- The National Centres for Independent Living report a significant reduction in the need for hospital-based treatment of skin ulcers among people with paraplegia and quadriplegia in self-help group discussions. The average cost of hospital treatment of decubiti ulcers is \$300 per day. (Rintala, D.H., Young, M.E., Hart, K.A., Clearman, R.R., 1992).

## **SMOKING**

- Male and female smokers who participated in support groups and used smoking cessation manuals and watched television programming, had higher quit rates after a three-week intervention than comparable others who only used manuals and watched television (41 percent vs 21 percent). At three month follow-up employees in the group condition maintained higher cessation rates (22 percent vs 12 percent). Participants were 525 employees from 43 corporations who were assigned at random to support group condition (N=233) or the non-group condition (N=192). (Jason, Gruder, Martino, Flay, Warnecke & Thomas, 1987).

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT**

- There is powerful evidence for the role of social support as a key element in dealing with illness. The data suggest that it even has an effect on morbidity rates. (Berkman, L.F., Syms, S. L., 1979).
- Nurses on a pediatric intensive care unit (ICU) who participated in a support group reported that participation improved their morale and communication skills. Additionally, the turnover of the participating nurses was reduced, while the rate increased in their hospital. (Weiner, M.F., Caldwell, T., 1983-1984).

## WIDOWS

- Widows paired with a widow contact who provided emotional support and practical assistance coped with their loss significantly better than did a group of unpaired similar widows. At six months, the "supported" widows who were most distressed initially were more likely to feel "better" and were less likely to anticipate difficulties adjusting to widowhood. At 12 months, these widows were significantly more likely to have made new friends and to have begun new activities. And at 24 months, these widows were significantly less distressed than similar unpaired widows. On the basis of random assignment, 68 women were placed in the intervention condition and 94 in a no treatment control condition. Most of the gains were comparison with highly distressed women in the control condition. (Vachov, M.L., Lyall, W.A., Rogers, J., Freedman-Letofsky, K. & Freeman, S.J. 1980).
- Members of THEOS (They Help Each Other Spiritually), a self-help organization for recently widowed persons, showed improvements in sense of well-being, self-esteem and sense of mastery over a one year time period, while a normative sample of bereaved persons, not in THEOS, showed deterioration in these areas. Members who developed social linkages within the group showed more positive changes than other participants: less anxiety and use of psychotropic medication and increased sense of well-being and mastery. The study involved two survey questionnaires mailed one year apart to members (N=376) and a probability sample of similarly bereaved person. (Lieberman & Videka-Sherman, 1986).



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