

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY **COURIER**

OA News and Information for the Professional Community

2009

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To learn more about OA, visit the OA Web site at www.oa.org

To order from the OA online bookstore, go to www.oa.org

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Why Should You Refer a Patient to OA?

Over the past two decades, I have been a clinical director privileged to be involved with people who suffer from eating disorders: compulsive overeating, bulimia, binge eating and some forms of anorexia. Often I am asked whether joining OA and "working the Steps" holds the same beneficial promise for someone who suffers from eating disorders as it does for people, such as those in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), who suffer from other addictions. My consistent response has been a resounding "Yes."

Most "flavors" of eating disorders all have in com-

mon a sense of powerlessness central to all addictions. A lesson from our alcoholic cousins in AA notes that it's not how often or how much someone drinks but what happens to them when they pick up a drink. For a food addict, it's not a matter of how often or how much food he or she eats, or how overweight or underweight the person may be, but how unmanageable life has become because of an addictive relationship with food.

One of the most prevalent misconceptions about OA is that the goal of recovery is to change one's size,



therefore assuming weight is the sole symptom of addictive-eating diseases. To be sure, most members experience a significant change in weight as a result of ending their addictive relationship with food. But not all compulsive overeaters are overweight, and many people who purge after binge eating or who alternate

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I Wholeheartedly Endorse OA



I am a family doctor practicing in Calgary, Canada. Like everyone else working in health care, I have a large proportion of overweight and obese patients. Most of them know they

need to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. In fact, they tend to be experts on matters of weight loss and nutrition. They aren't overweight because they don't know what to do with food. They are overweight because they cannot adhere to a healthy plan of eating for more than a finite period of time.

These patients struggle with a secret and powerful shame. They don't understand why knowledge isn't

enough to help them combat the extra weight. Most of them have tried every commercial diet plan and have read all the diet books, only to have temporary success followed by relapse. These patients fail to realize their struggle with food is only the tip of an iceberg. Their problems often are not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual. I have learned that when they find healing on an emotional and spiritual

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OA Is a Powerful Extension of Professional Services

As a registered dietitian, I understand my clients want to lose weight and keep it off. Despite my best nutritional advice, some clients continue to struggle with food, eating, weight and body shape. I collaborate with my clients' physicians and psychotherapists, but often that is not enough. Then one day a client told me about the help and support she had found in Overeaters Anonymous.

I learned that OA is a fellowship of men and women in all stages of recovery from food and eating issues. They share their experience, strength and hope with each other. OA has since become a powerful help to my practice and clients.

OA offers four indispensable tools. The first is sponsorship. A sponsor is someone willing to talk with my client daily and to help him or her plan the day around food. A sponsor helps my client learn how to follow the physician's and my recommen-



dations. I may not have time to talk to each client every day to provide support and encouragement, but a sponsor can do that and can provide guidance to meet goals within the framework the client and I have created.

The second tool is meetings. In OA meetings, people come together who are willing to share the tools, tips and techniques that help them solve their problems with food. The meetings provide my clients a wealth of practical information on how to

handle day-to-day problems around food and eating.

The third tool is support. Someone in OA is willing to talk with any of my clients day or night to give support for achieving food-related goals. The camaraderie and fellowship of this program are invaluable.

The fourth tool is a powerful, spiritual program. By the time people come to a dietitian with eating problems, they are dealing with more than just poor food choices. OA provides a

powerful spiritual program that helps my clients move toward a solution to other life problems that either caused or resulted from their eating problems.

Over time, I have come to know more about and to respect the work of Overeaters Anonymous. It has become a powerful extension of my professional services and has helped me provide more effective assistance to my clients than I could have imagined.

— H. Theresa Wright,
MS, RD, LDN

Complementing the Professional Community With Overeaters Anonymous

Many professional organizations and institutions work with OA members to inform other professionals and the public about compulsive eating and the resources available in OA to address this problem.

OA is not in competition with the professional community. On the contrary, many members consider OA to be a complement to the professional services they receive.

In part, OA works because it offers an ongoing support system for members and encourages them to help one another,

thereby weakening their isolation and loneliness. OA members provide this support through sharing their experience, strength and hope with one another. OA claims no medical, nutritional or psychological expertise. It suggests that interested members contact qualified professionals for help in these areas.

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level, they are more likely to find it on a physical level too.

One powerful resource that can help them make this connection is Overeaters Anonymous (OA). OA is a Twelve-Step group that looks at compulsive eating as an addictive process and derives its tenets from the Twelve-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. It addresses the issue of why someone eats compulsively and offers a program of recovery that leads not only to physical recovery

but also to spiritual and emotional recovery. It is self-supporting through member donations and is available in most urban and many rural centers, and it is completely inclusive.

I have been very happy with what OA has done for my patients. I wholeheartedly endorse OA to my overweight patients and to those patients struggling with binge eating and body image distortion, whatever their weight.

— Monica Skrukwa, MD

Why Should You Refer a Patient to OA?

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between restrictive diets and overeating do not suffer with that symptom of obesity. In my experience, the poorest way to define an eating disorder is to base the diagnosis upon what someone weighs.

Add to this the tendency for many to measure recovery only in terms of weight change rather than the improved quality of life that comes from working a recovery program, and you begin to understand the difference between a diet club and a way of life often referred to as recovery. As a professional working in the field of eating disorders, I find that OA offers more than a support group for people who want to look better. It offers an opportunity for members to achieve monumental changes in their lives that would not be possible by traditional means of treatment alone.

What separates OA from being just another diet or weight-loss group is rooted in the Twelve Steps. Inherent in these principles are

Pamphlets for Professionals

The World Service Office (WSO) of Overeaters Anonymous carries pamphlets for health-care professionals. Call the WSO or go online at www oa org/literature_catalog.htm for ordering information and other pamphlet titles.

Introducing OA to Health-Care Professionals—Explains how OA complements professional care. Includes a questionnaire for clients and patients about eating behaviors. (#753 \$1.15 each)

Is Food a Problem for You?—Includes 15 questions to determine if someone is a compulsive eater, a brief description of the OA program and its varied membership, brief member testimonials and the Twelve Steps. (#750 \$1.20 each)

Treatment and Beyond—Explains OA's recovery program and eases the transition from treatment center to OA meeting. (#757 \$1.00 each)

Fifteen Questions—Helps your client decide if he or she is a compulsive overeater. (#755 \$1.10 each)

US Shipping: \$5 for orders up to \$24.99. Orders \$25 to \$59.99, 20% of total. Orders \$60 to \$99.99, 17% of total. Above \$100, 12% of order. Call the WSO for expedited service fees and for shipping outside the US.

the primary elements needed to recover from an addiction. OA, like its cousin AA, seeks to remedy the three cornerstones of addiction—the physical, emotional and spiritual damages resulting from addictive disease.

Overeaters Anonymous offers an opportunity for people of all sizes and shapes to meet on the common ground of searching for a way out of the abyss

of food addiction. I have found that having our patients participate in OA meetings and encouraging them to continue with meetings when they return home make the difference between helping them find a brief reprieve from their disease and offering them a long-term solution.

Many professionals and treatment programs do good work. They offer people an opportunity to

Preamble

Overeaters Anonymous is a Fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience, strength and hope, are recovering from compulsive overeating. We welcome everyone who wants to stop eating compulsively. There are no dues or fees for members; we are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting nor accepting outside donations. OA is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology or religious doctrine; we take no position on outside issues. Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive overeating and to carry this message of recovery to those who still suffer.

regain their footing in order to begin their recovery journey. However, like professionals who have worked with alcoholics and addicts, those of us familiar with eating disorders know that OA and the Twelve Steps offer something no single professional or treatment program can provide—long-term recovery from a “seemingly hopeless state of mind and body” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., p. xiii).

—Marty Lerner, Ph.D., executive and clinical director of eating-disorders clinic

We Want to Hear From You!

Please let us know how we can better inform you about OA's Twelve-Step program. Check any of the boxes below:

- Send me a Professional Kit with detailed information about your program.
- Send me two free issues of *Lifeline*, your recovery magazine.
- Let me know about OA members in my area who could speak to professional groups.

Name _____

Company/Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Province _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Have you ever referred a patient/client to OA? yes no

I would like to see articles on the following topics in future issues of the *Courier*:

“Hearing Is Believing: OA Members Speak” CD

Hear a five-minute excerpt from *Hearing Is Believing: OA Members Speak . . .*, a 20-minute CD that depicts the inspiring journeys of several OA members from despair to recovery and serenity:

www oa org

Overeaters Anonymous
P.O. Box 44020
Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4020

Address Service Requested

12 STEPS

Twelve Steps

- to freedom from yo-yo dieting
- to peer understanding
- to renewed self-esteem
- to freedom from compulsion
- to a healthier body
- to a new attitude toward life



<http://www.oa.org>



Together We Can