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Book Review

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Two Addiction Professionals Review of "Molecular Neurobiology of Addiction Recovery: The 12 Steps Program and Fellowship"

By Kenneth Blum, John Femino, Scott Teitelbaum, John Giordano, Marlene Oscar-Berman, Mark Gold. 2014
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A Normie's Perspective

This review is written from the perspective of a "normie," one of those working in the field of addiction treatment that is neither an alcoholic nor an addict.

From 2007-2014 I was the co-owner, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Malibu Beach Recovery Center. I answered most admission calls personally and was therefore usually the first voice a potential client heard. Most were calling because they were looking for a holistic neuroscience based program and believed that what we did was cutting edge – eating according to a high-dopamine low-glycemic diet, finding balance by doing several hours a day of kurma yoga, and taking an over the counter supplement designed to raise dopamine levels (SynaptagenX).

I would then add that they would be working with a stellar clinical team – almost everyone liked that, and that they would get an introduction to the 12-Step Philosophy. That made a good number of prospective admits who fit our client profile ask: "Do I have to do that part?"

The answer was "yes," while in treatment, and "you can decide for yourself" after completing treatment. I would then go on to explain that after graduating, there was a huge advantage in having a ready network of people who could understood them, and that the 12 Step program provided excellent structure for life-after-rehab.

Try as I would, there were not a few possible admits, with great potential to succeed in our unique program, who never called back because they were dead set against attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. How I wish I could have fedexed them this book or emailed them an e-book copy of "Molecular Neurobiology of Addiction Recovery The 12 Steps Program and Fellowship for Dummies."

A Clinician's Perspective

We alcoholics/addicts are cynical people. Tell us that you can give us a program that will change our lives and lead us to a bright and successful future and we will likely shake our heads and walk away, muttering that it all sounds like nonsense to us. But give us scientific proof and factual evidence of how our brains can literally be healed, and that thwarted doctor within us all will happily acquiesce. That is the hope that this book offers.

The field of addiction medicine is relatively new, and although many have long believed that traditional 12 Step model recovery (coupled with therapy and medication management) is the most effective treatment over the greatest course of time with the widest cross-section of people, there is always a push to delve deeper into the causes of addiction in the hope that a more evidence-based treatment modality can be defined.

Dr. Kenneth Blum, Dr. Mark Gold and their associates have studied the genetic makeup of those who develop addictions for decades, and using this data they have created a neurobiological blueprint for why we alcoholics/addicts exhibit traits and behaviors that were once viewed as amoral and degenerate. Surely the results of poor impulse control, rage and projected anxiety, and that unique self-absorption and selfishness inherent in all manifestations of addiction are devastating to the family and social functioning of those in their addiction. However, by having a neurobiological explanation for how and why these behaviors persist despite all rationale to stop we can develop a different type of acceptance of the efficacy of working a program designed to change how we think.

Each chapter of this book addresses physiological and character traits of addiction and describes in depth from a

The book makes for fascinating reading because it demonstrates that the 12 Steps, which evolved based on empirical evidence in the late 1930s, were actually rooted in neuroscience, a distinct academic discipline that only began to be recognized in its own right in the 1950s.

The Fourth Step, "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves" is one of my favorites examples of this. When Pamela Graham was a Malibu Beach Recovery Center staff member, she would always try to have clients do at least a mini-fourth step before they transitioned to a sober living. I would see clients sitting around the dining room table studiously compiling long lists of their resentments, and then analyzing their part in those resentments. Finally, guided by Pam, they would let it all go – usually on the lawn of the treatment center overlooking the brilliant Pacific Ocean.

It was fascinating to discover from reading "Molecular Neurobiology of Addiction Recovery: The 12 Steps Program and Fellowship" that the joy I saw on the faces of our clients when they performed an AA ritual pioneered by Bill W, Dr. Bob, and the Oxford Group more than 70 years ago, can now be justified scientifically through clinical studies made in the first decade of this new century by some of the world's leading addiction scientists.

Joan Borsten

Joan Borsten, a graduate of University of California at Berkeley, University of Southern California, is a former journalist and film producer. She co-founded the Malibu Beach Recovery Center with her husband Oleg Vidov. She recently authored with four of her executive chefs the groundbreaking "Malibu Beach Recovery Diet Cookbook". www.malibubeachrecoverydietcookbook.com

scientific perspective why the 12 Steps will work to deconstruct those 'automatic' impulses. There is a lovely balance between the hard science aspects and a description of recovery based principles that is beautifully written and very relatable.

The chapters addressing Steps Six and Nine were especially enlightening as they dispelled the misunderstandings that many of us feel in our addictions; that we are essentially damaged and our 'character defects' are an aberration. Dr. Blum and co-authors help to bring the light of science and rationale in explaining how although our characters are shaped by heredity and environmental factors, we still have the ability to choose to be honest and pursue the choices of how we can choose to behave differently.

Molecular Neurobiology of Addiction Recovery: The 12 Steps Program and Fellowship is a book that will provide insight and hope across disciplines and, most importantly, will provide answers and solutions for those struggling with addictions and their families. It really proves, "there is a solution"!

Liz Winchell

Liz Winchell, granddaughter of radio personality Walter Winchell, and daughter of Hyatt Hotel chain founder Hyatt von Dehn, is a certified addiction counselor. She is currently completing her Masters of Family Therapy at Phillips Academy. Director of Admissions for Bridges Recovery Center, she has been in recovery for 20 years.