

To Whom it May Concern:

I am very concerned about 12-Step programs being entrenched in the mental health profession. After leaving a long-term relationship and going to daily AA meetings for a full year voluntarily because I had heard that's what I needed to do (get 'into recovery'), I found that I was feeling more and more hopeless and neurotic, and since Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) wasn't helping me, I began to find that my mind was spinning with thoughts that I was "powerless, insane, selfish, defective, dishonest, warped, incapable, unmanageable", etc. These are not words that anyone in my life ever really used to describe me. They come from the AA literature which I studied intensively while "waiting for the miracle".

I decided, on the advice of a friend, to get professional help, which I got from Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region, and they happened to have an office in the 'sponsor church' that hosted one of my AA meetings. At first, my therapist seemed to understand and even empathize with my confusion. Records show that my first session notes showed difficulty relating to AA and deep confusion. Records also show that I began to sober up as I was able to talk about things I couldn't really talk about in public 12-step meetings. I became optimistic again and happy. My therapist and I had a very similar belief system and it felt like I had found someone who understood me.

Within a couple months, 'transference issues' started coming up. She engaged with a supervisor (her boss) who began instructing her on how to 'treat' an 'alcoholic'. She started to say things like "I'm required to suggest you go to meetings, work the steps, and get a sponsor". It was so weird because I was doing that, and I was in therapy because it was not helpful. I went into deep depression as I started to realize the system was not going to let me find another way.

She referred me to an 'addictions specialist' (\$110/session) with the intent to discontinue therapy once the transfer was made. The addictions specialist told me that I was developmentally stunted and had a lot of fear. To show him I wasn't afraid, I agreed to do the treatment he suggested. I went to 12-step outpatient rehab which costed about \$265/session (once per week) to get a drug test, watch a movie like 'Antwone Fisher' (a good movie, but is this 'treatment?'), and sneak in the individual session during the group meeting. Honestly, I expected 'rehab' to be something more along the lines of monitoring my blood pressure during detox and checking me for health issues.

There is a lot more to the story of this crazy-making treatment, but basically I was confronted with gradually escalating 'treatments', eventually leading me to a psychiatric ward, then referrals to \$17,000/mo inpatient rehab, my further requests to discuss 12-step coercion being completely ignored, more referrals to 12-step meetings and 'rehab', another psychiatric ward stay, anti-psychotic medications, and finally, after being completely used up and angry, they told me never to contact them again and labeled my complaint as 'Axis 2' behavior.

I was so profoundly disturbed by this refusal to acknowledge my experience that, rather than kill myself, I created a website called notpowerless.com. I made a cartoon about my experience (which you can find by googling "Alcoholics Anonymous Coercion in Therapy"). What disturbs me most is that Samaritan Counseling Center's therapists licensed by the State of New York seem to think this is both helpful and right, regardless of feedback.

Sincerely,

Tom Gleason