



March 2014

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

Newsletter for Professionals

A history of co-operation

Alcoholics Anonymous has sought to cooperate with the professional community throughout its existence. In 1939, the first edition of its book *'Alcoholics Anonymous'* (from which the movement took its name) included a doctor's opinion in the preface and a medical view of AA in the appendices. These continue to be included in all subsequent editions.

This cooperation carried over to Australia during World War II when Dr Sylvester Minogue, a Macquarie Street psychiatrist, obtained a copy of the book in the hope it could help some of his patients. Thus, from this initiative of the medical profession, sprang AA in Australia.

About fifteen years after the war, Australia set up a national advisory body of AA members, known as the Australian AA General Service Conference. At its very first gathering, it suggested that doctors should be invited to participate in the annual AA Convention that rotates around Australia every Easter. Letters were sent to all NSW doctors known to AA.

In 1985, the AA Conference renewed its commitment to co-operate with the professional community. As a consequence, AA prepared a guideline on presenting AA to professional people. It followed this up with a further guideline on how local AA Groups could best organise themselves to provide information to professionals. AA also adopted and 'Australianised' the USA brochure *'If You are a Professional'*.

To make it even easier for busy professionals, AA decided a few years ago to condense its fact file and pamphlets for professionals into one small booklet. This work is in progress. In the meantime, AA offers a short video for professionals on its website: www.aa.org.au/health-media/

In recent years, AA surveyed Australian health administration professionals about their attitudes to AA. It disturbed AA members that a few professionals had concluded, because of no recent contact from AA that the movement had ceased to function. To the contrary, there are now over 1,900 AA meetings held every week across Australia.

These surveyed professionals also identified several concerns about AA: that AA is religious; that their

clients might have to pay for AA services; and that AA might interfere in the relationship between doctor and patient.

This quarterly *'Newsletter for Professionals'* is one outcome of the invaluable feedback they provided. AA has a variety of pamphlets which answer any questions professionals may have, including that the AA program has a spiritual basis, but AA is definitely not religious. Indeed, the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, has always contained a chapter titled: *'We Agnostics'*. For information, AA reads out at every meeting that it is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution.

AA is available for any of your clients who want help with stopping drinking, all day every day for no charge. Written, audio and video information is available on the AA website, www.aa.org.au and they can talk to a member of AA by ringing 1300 22 22 22.

Most importantly, as far back as the mid-1980s, the AA Conference advised all Australian AA members that they should never suggest anyone discontinue prescribed medication. To reinforce this long standing policy, the AA Conference approved a new brochure in 2010 addressing the issue of unqualified medical advice. It was bluntly titled: *'Telling Other Members to Stop Taking Prescribed Medications is Dangerous'*. This pamphlet, written by a non-alcoholic who practices as

a psychiatrist, explains to AA members the vital importance of the relationship between a doctor and their patient. You can obtain a copy by emailing gso@aa.org.au or phoning 02 9599 8866.

To further reassure professionals, AA policy is that we are not authorities on alcoholism. You can also take comfort that AA does not make diagnoses, offer medical advice or engage in professional treatment. We do not define 'alcoholism' or profess any profound knowledge of its cause or 'cure'. AA has no opinion on public policy or practices regarding what some professionals term 'alcohol dependence and abuse'. AA does not compete with other treatments or get into debates about evidence for or against various treatment options. AA does not provide drying out, professional treatment or other welfare services. Neither does it educate about alcohol nor engage in research.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Introducing Class A Trustee Rodger Bull

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Australia is the chief service arm of the Australian General Service Conference and is essentially custodial in its character. It consists of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic trustees. In seeking candidates for non-alcoholic Trustees (Class A) the Board looks for men and women with a proven track record in their own fields, a demonstrated interest in Alcoholics Anonymous and some experience in working with AA and its members.

Rodger Bull is the Priest in Charge of the Anglican Church in Belmont W.A. and is also on the Mental Health Review Board in Western Australia. Many meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous are held in Church halls throughout Australia and Rodger's Church is one of them. Rodger first came into contact

with AA through a funeral for a member. Rodger has always been impressed by the honesty of AA members, their willingness to face their problems and the resounding support that the fellowship of AA provides. "there's no shame, there's no judgement, no condemnation it's just overwhelming support." "I sometimes wish the Church was a bit more like AA!" he quips.

Rodger's work over eight years with the Mental Health Review Board involves ensuring that the least restrictive option is employed in treating patients.

He sees alcohol is often a significant compounding component for patients in the cases he reviews.

Many people have some misconceptions about AA and a common one is that AA is a religious program. This surprised Rodger. "some people hold an aversion to it (AA) because they think it's a religious program, and in fact nothing could be further from the truth. Certainly people aren't beaten over the head and tried to be converted. That's not what AA is about. It's open to people to acknowledge that there is a higher power, and that's important in the recovery process but I've come across people in the program who have a loose concept of this higher power, not sure what it all means yet they are recovering well." The common aspect of AA that Rodger

keeps returning to is the idea of "mutual support they get from other alcoholics who have been there and experienced what they've experienced, that's what the program's about, getting people better not getting them into a religious program"



Rodger has a strong motivation for giving his time and energy to AA, it ties in with his work on the Mental Health Review Board and his work in the parish where he sees problems with alcohol

that may spill over to domestic violence. Belmont is the second lowest socio-economic area in Perth, so he's faced with a lot of that issue. Being involved with AA makes him a bit of a bridge between those people and the possibility of recovery. "It's a good organisation to be involved with".

"What I contribute to AA at the board level is my own expertise that I've built up over the years "

Rodger sees one of the main benefits of the AA program as one of mutual support. Other programs are what might be called professional or clinical programs, where someone goes to an appointment or a group meeting, but they may not have the availability of a mentor, somebody they can turn to when the going gets tough and it's the one on one mutual support that comes through AA that is the overwhelming benefit and it's total focus on recovery for the Alcoholic and nothing else.

Some people see AA as an unusual organisation—it's not a hierarchical organisation with a command structure and for someone with a professional background that may be a challenge. Rodger agrees it is a different organisation that does take some getting used to, but at the end of the day it's not difficult for professionals to contact, there are central numbers that people can ring and a national website, to find out where there's a group, where they can refer people, or get material they can give to clients.

How Can A.A. Help You?

Would you be interested in having an A.A. presentation at one of your professional gatherings? Or would you like information about recovery from alcoholism in A.A.? If so, please contact

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