

Personal Business

Today, at least 5-million Americans are victims of alcoholism.

The subject is discussed more freely these days than ever before. But it's still surrounded by a miasma of misinformation.

For example, it may seem necessary to call for help from Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA. But though AA celebrates 25 years this summer, surprisingly few people know much about its workings.

Suppose you have an alcoholic friend who obviously needs help. The first step, if he's in bad shape, is to call his or your family doctor. You can follow this up by suggesting to the victim's wife (or husband) that it might be wise to contact AA. Or you can call AA yourself (it is listed in all city telephone directories). In many cases, of course, the doctor will suggest it.

Soon after you call AA, usually two members will appear. The wait may be a few hours--but probably no longer.

The two visitors will want to talk with your friend privately for at least half an hour, maybe much longer. If you haven't called a physician, they may do so. Or they may call a hospital for alcoholics; AA maintains contact with such institutions. In a hospital, the victim usually stays about five days, for rest under sedation and frequent conversation with AA members. The cost: \$75 to \$100.

If hospitalization isn't needed, AA will make sure that your friend gets to his own home. If he lives out of town, they can even arrange for other AAs to meet him at the airport or railroad station.

Once the initial crisis has passed, AA's long-range program of rehabilitation begins. Basically, the program consists of 12 suggested steps--making up a simple philosophy. **There are four main points:**

An admission of defeat--a recognition that with drinking, life has become unmanageable.

A decision to seek the help of a Higher Power--which doesn't necessarily mean church religion or even a formal concept of God.

Self-analysis and a program to make

amends and remove shortcomings.

An attempt to apply AA teachings daily and assist other alcoholics.

It's important that an alcoholic decide for himself to work with AA.

Don't force the subject. Psychiatrists and AA members alike will advise you to suggest the idea, perhaps pointedly--but that's all.

If he does want AA's help, members will get him to a local group meeting as soon as possible--maybe even the same night, if he can navigate. He becomes an AA "member" simply by saying he wants to join; there are no dues, fees, or formal requirements.

For a number of weeks or months, the new member likely will be under close "sponsorship." In many cases, veteran AAs will actually drive the newcomer to local meetings several nights a week. If he shows sustained interest, they will keep this up--even if he slips and takes a drink.

Meetings usually are held evenings in church halls (of all denominations). They combine an hour of talks or open discussion, with an hour or so of informal conversation over coffee and cake.

Speakers tell their own stories--omitting little--and explain how they were helped by AA. The new member soon hears a story closely paralleling his own; this way, he "relates" and becomes a part of the group.

Most newcomers quickly become active in the program. It is highly recommended that they do so. This means attending perhaps three or four meetings a week, for the first year or two; doing the coffee and cake chore, and eventually serving as group secretary, treasurer, program chairman, and chairman. Most important, it means calling on new prospects.

After the new AA member passes the crucial three-month mark in staying sober, some groups will give him a token lapel pin (which he wears only if he wants to). After a

full year without a drink, there is apt to be a special anniversary meeting in his honor.

In many cities, he can join AA luncheon clubs meeting in top restaurants. (He will be surprised at the number of executives and professional men present.) He can even take his wife to AA social events and, in many cases,

to meetings. And always, night or day, he can practice "10 cent therapy"--when he feels the urge to take a drink, he can step to a phone booth and call an AA friend. If he does this, chances are he won't take the drink.

Source: *Business Week*, April 16, 1960, pp. 165-166