

3-Step Self-Help Referral Manual

HOW TO REFER PATIENTS TO SELF-HELP

This is an active referral intervention developed at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

Researchers at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System implemented a method that substance use disorder treatment staff can use to refer patients to 12-step groups. The method was associated with more 12-step group attendance and involvement and better substance use outcomes, at a 1 year follow-up of patients, than was usual care. The intervention is provided over three sessions.

Step 1

During the first session the counselor gives the patient a schedule of local 12-Step self-help group (SHG) meetings. The counselor also gives the patient a list of local meetings favored by other patients who have been in the outpatient program, with the times and locations of, and directions to (by foot, car and public transportation), those meetings. In addition, the counselor gives the patient a handout on 12-Step SHGs for alcohol and drug misuse that provides an introduction to 12-Step philosophy and the structure and terminology of 12-Step groups, addresses common concerns about participation and encourages patients to set goals for attending self-help, working the first Steps, joining a home group and obtaining a sponsor. The counselor reviews the handout with the patient.

In addition, at the first session the counselor arranges a meeting between the patient and a participating member of an AA or NA group. Specifically, the counselor and patient called a SHG volunteer during the session and the volunteer arranged to meet the patient before an AA or NA meeting so that they could attend the meeting together. Project staff members served as liaisons between counselors and SHGs to coordinate the availability of volunteers.

Also at the first session, the patient and the counselor agree on the 12-Step SHG meetings to be attended before the next session, and this agreement is written into a journal provided to the patient by the counselor. Patients are asked to keep this journal to record the SHG meetings attended (dates, times, places) and, briefly, their personal reactions to and thoughts about the meetings (or their reasons for not attending).

Step 2

At the second outpatient session, the counselor asks if the patient has read and has any questions about the handout. If the patient has not attended a SHG meeting, the counselor repeats the procedure of contacting a volunteer with the patient. The journal is reviewed by the counselor so that any doubts and concerns the patient may have about self-help participation can be addressed. (See the handout on this website that provides a list of patients' common concerns about attending SHGs and responses to them.). The patient is asked to show the counselor that the SHG's secretary has 'signed off' on each meeting attended. Again, the patient and the counselor agree on the 12-Step SHG meetings to be attended before the next session, and this agreement is written into the journal.

For patients who attended a 12-Step SHG meeting, encourage him or her to contact the meeting secretary to obtain a list of currently available sponsors or temporary sponsors. Inform them that a temporary sponsor can be replaced by a more permanent one when the patient is more familiar with other SHG members. Address any concerns the patient may have about asking for and working with a sponsor (see handout on this website about sponsorship).

Step 3

At the third outpatient session, the procedure for contacting the SHG volunteer is repeated if the patient has not yet attended a meeting. The journal is also reviewed by the counselor, and the agreement for the next week's 12-Step meeting attendance written in. Counselors check with patients who have already attended a meeting and received a list of potential sponsors as to whether they had contacted an individual about sponsorship.

For more information, see [Timko, DeBenedetti, & Billow, 2007](#)