A VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Good Afternoon. My name is Ranjan Bhattacharyya and I am the General Secretary of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain.

First of all I would like to thank OPEN FORUM for opportunity to talk about our experience of alcoholism, recovery and Alcoholics Anonymous.

After a short introduction on AA I will hand over to our Non-Alcoholic Trustee Mani Mehdikani and then to Emma a recovering alcoholic.

Objective

Our objective is to give you an insight into AA. How it operates, and how it can help. Hopefully we can clear up some myths along the way.
If you leave more aware and confident in AA, and prepared to recommend AA to problem drinkers, we will feel we have been successful.

Resource

We clearly understand that AA is only one of a number of different types of resource available. Studies show that AA is effective in helping alcoholics achieve long term sobriety (any one can stop, not starting again the issue)
We believe it makes good sense to introduce AA to alcoholics seeking a way out, and to use AA in combination with other forms of treatment.

Is there an issue with alcohol use today?

Excerpt from a House of Commons Pack for a debate held in February 2017 on tackling alcohol harm.

"*In recent years, many indicators of alcohol-related harm have increased. There are now over 1 million hospital admissions relating to alcohol each year. Alcohol-related mortality has increased, particularly for liver disease which has seen a 400% increase since 1970. More working years of life are lost in England as a result of alcohol-related deaths than from cancer of the lung, bronchus, trachea, colon, rectum, brain, pancreas, skin, ovary, kidney, stomach, bladder and prostate, combined.*"

Public Health England reported in December 2016 that "*amongst those aged 15 to 49 in England, alcohol is now the leading risk factor for ill-health, early mortality and disability*"

Are all problem drinkers alcoholics? Certainly not!

- Data from the Royal College of Psychiatrists
- 9 out of 10 people in the UK drink alcohol
- 1 in 3 men & 1 in 6 women will develop health problems caused by alcohol
- Around 1 in 11 men & 1 in 25 women are physically dependant on alcohol (1 in 18)

What is an Alcoholic?

In AA we do not pronounce any drinker as alcoholic, however our book Alcoholics Anonymous does provide the drinker with the relevant information to make their own judgement. The majority of our members agree that most of us had a physical desire to consume alcohol beyond our capacity to control it, in defiance of all common sense.

Medical News Today: Alcoholics are obsessed with alcohol and cannot control how much they consume, even if it is causing serious problems at home, work, and financially.

World Health Organisation: A person whose loss of control over drinking affects every aspect of their life.

Our view of alcoholism

- It's an illness (or disease) not a moral issue
- It's not selective (Intelligence/Education/Society)
- Its an illness of denial (thus dishonesty)
- It's a progressive condition the sufferer never gets better – only worse
- There is no cure - once an alcoholic always an alcoholic

The Disease Concept

AA believes Alcoholism to be a 3 fold disease (or illness)

Mental: It starts with the **mental obsession**

Physical: (An abnormal reaction) Once we take a drink, the physical craving is activated - one drink will never be enough And we are powerless over the outcome. It's the First Drink that does the Damage

Spiritual: Problem Drinkers are usually unhappy people, searching for wholeness through alcohol (Spiritual change-way think/act)

How it Works:

When one recovering alcoholic talks to another and gains their trust through identification with a shared misery they also gain a hearing for a program of recovery.

- Not taking a drink One Day At A Time – telling an alcoholic they can never drink again is often overwhelming. Therefore we say just don't drink today
- Regular Meetings – consistently going to AA Meetings increases the chances of staying sober ODAAT
- Service in a Home Group – going to the same meeting builds a sense of fellowship, and taking responsibility for a task however mundane re-builds self-esteem
- Going through the 12 Step Program with a sponsor
- AA has found that those who thoroughly follow this path more likely to maintain a sober and happy life.
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2746426/ for one of many meta-studies on AA effectiveness

AA Locally

Today in the UK we have over 4,400 groups and about 50,000 members

In the Greater Manchester Area there are over a 100 meetings per week

How can the problem drinker contact AA?

- Website (our stats show that the split between returning and new visits is 50/50)
- Telephone helpline manned 24/7
- On line
- Treatment centres, drug and alcohol agencies
- Support groups
- Personal contact
- Open Meetings

The AA “Unique Selling Points”

- Available now. Available 24/7
- Free
- Local - 4,400 groups in Great Britain
- Don’t have to have stopped drinking
- Can provide a lifetimes aftercare and social network