Adolescents Benefit From Attending 12-Step Meetings

Teens undergoing treatment for alcohol or drug abuse can benefit from the 12-step program used by groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), researchers say.

While these programs are widely available, little research has looked at how effective they are for teens.

The new study included 127 teen substance abuse-treatment outpatients (95 males, 32 females, aged 14 to 19) who were assessed when they began treatment and three, six and 12 months later.

The findings are published online and in the July print issue of the journal *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

The study found that about one-quarter to one-third of the youth attended AA/NA throughout the year-long study period following treatment, and that more meeting attendance was associated with significantly better substance use outcomes -- particularly attending meetings at least once per week or more. Additionally, youth who also were in contact with an AA or NA sponsor or who participated verbally during AA/NA meetings had an even better outcome over and above the positive effects from merely attending. This is the first evidence to support this common clinical recommendation among young people.

Doctors, counselors and other health professionals can improve the chances that teens will attend and participate in AA/NA by encouraging or making it easy for the teens to attend meetings early in their substance abuse treatment.

Researchers noted that starting an on-site NA or AA young persons' meeting is another good idea. Not all youth will be motivated to attend, but the more severely substance-involved ones will be more likely to give meetings a try and these are the ones most likely to benefit. It is also a good idea to facilitate a good match between the patient's primary substance, cannabis/other drugs or

alcohol, and the mutual-help organization to which they are being referred, Marijuana Anonymous, NA or AA. Not doing this can lead to a poor initial match, which can be difficult to overcome.

SOURCE: *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, news release, April 16, 2012

For additional information on alcohol, drugs and youth, click here.