Information and motivation groups for people who drive when prone to alcohol

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1. Conceptional reflections

Experience over the past years have shown that people prone to alcohol and yet drive, are difficult to influence through the conventional psycho-social advisory and treatment centres for alcohol addicts and ill persons.

These people are usually sent from an advisory centre or the authorities because they should enlist for specialized help for their alcohol problem.

The person affected focuses his/her attention on his/her missing driving licence and concentrates on getting it back again. This often prohibits an examination of his/her drinking habits and a possible need for help.

Conventional information and motivation groups in the advisory centres in which alcohol prone drivers and alcoholic patients come together often end in a lack of understanding and destructiveness of each other. Similar observations have also been made by self-help groups for addicts. The "togetherness" of a group is found to be hindered rather than encouraged. The fear the alcohol prone driver has of being stigmatized as an alcoholic is very large.

My starting point about information and motivation groups wants to take into consideration the specific problems and defensive attitudes of the clientel who go to the advisory centres because of their "driving licence". Because the group participants are all in the same position it encourages solidarity and a mutual openness. Through specific reappraisal of the alcohol problem, the participants can alter their initial motivation: not only "recovery of the driving licence", but assessment of the daily, often carefree handling of alcohol is possible. It is obvious that changes in attitudes and behaviour are necessary.

Initial fear of coming lessons, the possible necessity of therapy to overcome the alcohol problem can be realized, and visits to the self-help groups are beneficial in coping with daily life.
2. Target Group

The group is for drivers who have been caught for drunken driving. The authorities have given the recommendation to seek specialized advice.

The aim of the group is to encourage the participants to see their own alcohol problem and to alter their ways as be necessary. This is made possible by showing the participants how to cope with alcohol in their daily lives and the consequences misuse has on them.

Taking part in the group is completely optional.

The group meets weekly for ten weeks for two hours a session.

3. Requirements for attendance

People can only take part in the group after having been to an advisory centre for addicts and had talks with the appropriate specialist.

Only those people take part whose problem obviously does not indicate an addiction to alcohol. It is emphasized that attendance of the group is not suitable for the treatment of alcohol addiction.

The following alcohol prone drivers are suitable to attend a group:

a) Those who lack awareness of the short term and long term effects excessive alcohol consumption has on them.

b) Those who lack awareness of how far their contact with alcohol has gone and their treatment need and thus a long-lasting abstinence.

c) Those who have been motivated to check and change their drinking habits by others.

d) Those who are in the process of changing their drinking habits themselves and want specialized help through group discussions.

All participants agree to regular attendance of the group discussion, to the payment of the group fees, as well as the recognition of the group's tasks and regulations.
All participants have to remain abstinent for the duration of the course. This can be certified by a general practitioner every four or six weeks.

It is also suggested that a participant contacts a self-help group for addicts if the need occurs.

4. Aims and Method

The participants have to find out their own alcohol habits and take resposibility to overcome them. This involves assessing their previous mistakes critically and the awareness that they should undergo the necessary treatment - either as a day patient or in an institution.

On one hand the group acts as an information mediator and on the other, see themselves clearly. This is done in the following way:

a) Examination of all available assessments of the MPU or evaluation of the already ascertained deficiencies and taking the necessary steps.

b) Giving information about alcohol. (How much alcohol there is in drinks and the effects it has.)

c) Giving information about the consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol.

d) Looking at the importance alcohol has had on the daily life up until now.

e) Detailed analysis of the present conspicuousness and its subjective evaluation.

f) Self-assessment of the individual risks using a KFA (a questionnaire for people who are prone to alcohol as worked out by Feuerlein).

g) Information as to the course of alcoholimus and its different forms according to Jellinek.

h) Working out ways in which the individual can change his/her present drinking habits.

i) Accepting abstinence as a responsible way of life.
5. Group Conclusion

At the end of the group work the participants receive a certificate. This certificate does not indicate any assessment or prognosis.

The participants have the possibility to have further individual talks if wished.

6. Experiences

Since 1988 more than 150 people have taken part in these groups. To find out about the driving licence situation questionaires were filled in by previous participants. These were sent one year after ending the group. Altogether three sets of questionaires were sent.

The acceptance of each questionnaire differed greatly. The following details were obtained:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>time of questioning</th>
<th>No. of people questioned</th>
<th>No. who have their driving licence</th>
<th>No. who have no driving licence</th>
<th>No. no answers received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13 (43%)</td>
<td>5 (17%)</td>
<td>12 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>18 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16 (38%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>25 (59%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result is surely limited due to the fact that a large number did not answer. If one assumes that all those who did not answer do not have a driving licence, one can say that atleast about forty per cent of the participants were able to solve their alcohol problem to the extent that they require no further treatment.