

February 15, 2017

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On Systematic Review of SMART Recovery Research Published in *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*

By SMART Recovery President Joe Gerstein, MD, FACP

We welcome the first review of research on SMART Recovery by an international team of addiction scientists, “Systematic Review of SMART Recovery: Outcomes, Process Variables and Implications for Research,” published in the February, 2017 issue of *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, one of the world’s leading addiction journals.

This review of scientific literature covered 12 studies published from 2000 to 2016. This growing body of research, especially in the most recent years, reflects the increased interest in the scientific community about the important role SMART could play in addiction recovery, alleviating one of the most serious global healthcare crises.

This study follows the publication in January, 2017 of the first “SMART Recovery Bibliography” – listing 109 research studies, articles, doctoral theses and other materials – by Rita Chaney, MS, and William White, MA. The first comprehensive review of SMART was conducted by Tom Horvath, PhD, FACP, and Julie Yeterian, PhD, “SMART Recovery: Self-Empowering, Science-Based Addiction Recovery Support,” published in 2012 in the *Journal of Groups in Addiction & Recovery*.

SMART Recovery hosts 2,200 free weekly mutual support group meetings in 19 countries, from Australia to the UK to Uzbekistan, including 1,200 meetings in the U.S. People anywhere in the world can participate in 30 weekly online meetings. Due to SMART’s accessibility, we strongly support the study’s recommendation to clinicians:

Given the positive effects of SMART Recovery and SMART Recovery-informed interventions to enhance client-centered, collaborative care ... tailored to the needs and preferences of the individuals, clinicians need to be aware of the range of mutual aid support options available, including SMART Recovery, and discuss these options with their clients. (p. 19)

All of this research underscores the potential for SMART to make an even greater contribution in the future to reducing addictive problems worldwide. SMART leaders and our network of some 4,000 volunteers, including professionals and trained meeting facilitators, stand ready to collaborate with scientific investigators in every way possible to advance and accelerate research into our recovery support model.

This new review using the most stringent and detailed guidelines available represents a milestone in research of SMART, coming just 23 years after its founding. By contrast, the research of Alcoholics Anonymous was first rigorously reviewed in 1993 (Emrick, et al.), 58 years after it was founded in 1935; and Narcotics Anonymous research has not yet been systematically studied.

The shorter timeframe may be attributed to the growing awareness that mutual support groups are integral for many people trying to recover from serious addictions. In addition, the clinical community has recognized the need for multiple pathways to recovery – and especially for self-empowering models that SMART has helped pioneer. For these and other reasons, more funding is available for the growing number of scientists focusing on the role of mutual support groups in addiction recovery.

Regardless of the scientific evidence about the efficacy of a particular mutual support group, the ultimate test of a group is whether people attend it. AA was well attended long before there was significant scientific evidence of its efficacy, because participants found these meetings helpful. Similarly, attendance in SMART meetings continues to grow because its self-empowering approach has been an option generally lacking in the mutual support group setting, and an option highly valued by many individuals.

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