

Scientific Underpinning

of

Preventive Medicine Associates Inc.

Therapeutic Community

What is a Therapeutic Community?

Therapeutic Communities [TCs] often referred to as “community as method” utilized for addiction treatment for about 40 years. In general, TCs are drug-free residential settings that use a hierarchical model with treatment stages that reflect increased levels of personal and social responsibility. Peer influence, mediated through a variety of group processes, is used to help individuals learn and assimilate social norms and develop more effective social skills. TCs differ from other treatment approaches principally in their use of the community comprising treatment staff and those in recovery, as key agents of change. TC members interact in structured and unstructured ways to influence attitudes, perception, and behaviors associated with drug use.

Many individuals admitted to TCs have a history of social functioning, education/vocational skills, and positive Community and family ties that have been eroded by their substance abuse. For them, recovery involves **rehabilitation** –relearning or re-establishing healthy functioning, skills and values as well as regaining physical and emotional health. Other TC residents have never acquired functioning life-styles. For these people, TC is usually their first exposure to orderly living. Recovery for them involves **habilitation** learning for the first time the behavioral skills, attitudes, and values associated with socialized living. In addition to the importance of the community as primary agent of change, a second fundamental TC principle is “self-help.” Self-help implies that the individuals in treatment are the main contributors to the change process. “Mutual self-help” means that individuals also assume partial responsibility for the recovery of the peers – an important aspect of an individual’s own treatment.

How Beneficial Are TCs in Treating Drug Addiction?

NIDA has conducted several large studies to advance scientific knowledge of the outcome of drug abuse treatment as typically delivered in the United States. These studies collected baseline data from over 65,000 individuals admitted to publicly funded treatment agencies. They included a sample of TC programs and other types of programs [i.e., methadone maintenance, out-patient drug-free, short-term inpatient, and detoxification programs]. Data were collected at admission, during treatment, and in a series of follow-ups that focused on outcomes that occurred 12 months and longer after treatment. These studies found that participation in a TC was associated with several positive outcomes. For example, the Drug Abuse Treatment Outcome Study [DATOS], the most recent long-term study of drug treatment outcomes, showed that those who successfully completed treatment in a TC had lower levels of cocaine, heroin, and alcohol use; criminal behavior; unemployment; and indicators of depression that they had before treatment.

How is Treatment Provided in a Therapeutic Community?

TC treatment can be divided into three major stages:

Stage 1: Induction and early treatment typically occurs during the first 30 days to assimilate the individual into the TC. The new resident learns TC policies and procedures; establishes trust with staff and other residents; initiates an assisted personal assessment of self, circumstances, and needs; begins to understand the nature of addiction; and should begin to commit to the recovery process.

Stage 2: Primary treatment often uses a structured model of progression through increasing levels of pro-social attitudes, behaviors, and responsibilities. The TC may use interventions to

change the individual's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to drug use and to address the social, educational, vocational, familial, and psychological needs of the individual.

Stage 3: Re-entry is intended to facilitate the individual's separation of the TC and successful transition to the larger society. A TC graduate leaves the program drug-free and employed or in school. Post-residential aftercare services may include individual and family counseling and vocational and education guidance. Self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are often incorporated into TC treatment, and TC residents are encouraged to participate in such groups after treatment.