



The Place For Wellness

How Long is the Road to Recovery?

“Rehab didn’t work,” the daughter lamented. “This morning my mother sounded like the same person she was before she went away.” “The drugs must still be affecting her.”

The despair expressed by this family member is not uncommon. There is the hope that rehab will create a “new” person who will have stopped using drugs or alcohol, and also discarded the behaviors blamed on the addiction. Unfortunately, the process of recovery is rarely that easy or that quick.

For the majority of addicted people, the use of drugs and alcohol must be seen as the symptom, not the problem. The disease which has taken control of their lives has roots far deeper than a desire to “feel good.” Addiction is a mask for hurts, pains, wounds and behaviors that need to be acknowledged, examined and healed.

Healing begins for each addicted person when they begin to grasp the “reason why” that stands in the shadows behind their alcohol and drug abuse. For some, the driving force may come from childhood experiences which left fears, anger or low self-worth. Others may discover that poor boundaries, grief, or a loss of purpose are contributing factors. The “problem” is always individual and personal, and if not addressed, lasting recovery may prove difficult.

A good rehabilitation program will be heavily preoccupied with discovering these causes and using a variety of therapies and treatments to begin the process of healing. Sometimes the needed change occurs very quickly, while in other situations the memories are painful and the problems complex, requiring time, patience, and compassion to find resolution.

Once the problem is uncovered, and the work of healing begun, the task does not end. While using drugs and alcohol, the addicted person has retarded their emotional development. Often the years of abuse have left the individual far behind in terms of their emotional growth. The 29 year old man, who has been using heroin and cocaine since he was 14, may emerge from the fog of his drug use showing the behavioral characteristics of a young adolescent, rather than those of a maturing adult.

Rehab may begin the road to recovery, but it is far from the end. Once the addiction has been set aside, the underlying causes must be addressed. This process of healing, the better management of emotions, and the changing of behaviors, does not happen overnight. There is ongoing work to be done, which if ignored, becomes an invitation to relapse.

Recovery, like the journey to experience life in its fullness, is a lifelong endeavor. It demands a constant commitment to self-examination and improvement. Hopefully the hardest part is during the first few months. It is at this time that many changes must be made and mistakes and false-starts may occur. However, with the support of family, friends, groups such as AA, and trust in God, the path toward wellness of body, mind, emotions and spirit must not be abandoned. In time, the struggle will lessen, and each new day embraced as a blessing.

The road to recovery is also a journey with many rewards. As wounds heal, emotions become more manageable, and behavior reflects positive, healthy beliefs. Lives become better. The work and struggle of recovery has a big payback – life can be experienced as a wondrous gift to be savored.

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