

A Communication to A.A.'s Physicians

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In December of 1965, Bill Wilson wrote a 30 page brochure titled *A Communication to A.A.'s Physicians*, which is not very well known. The article was never intended to be A.A. approved literature or provided to the general fellowship. The subtitle of the article was "THE VITAMIN B-3 THERAPY: A Promising Treatment for Schizophrenia – and its high relevance to the field of alcoholism". Also, at the bottom of the title page, Bill wrote "P.S. Please note the enclosed material is not for public quotation or use." Thus, consider this writing a work in progress that was experimental and exploratory. It is part of the conclusive evidence that classifies Bill W. as a seeker of anything that might someday help and alcoholic to get and stay sober.

In the introduction, Bill wrote "With ever mounting interest, I have long been watching a research into schizophrenia, the world's largest mental illness." He had been watching studies conducted by two physicians and he wanted to report and examine "impressive" results regarding the results of vitamin B-3 (niacin) therapy.

He reported that "schizophrenia, or a schizo tendency, is of the principal cause of many of the emotional troubles that beset us alcoholics, both before and after sobriety". He had been watching so many not getting sober that he was searching for additional answers to understand why so many people were not finding sobriety, or were miserable in sobriety. "The state of affairs, to which, something like one-third of all alcoholics now appear to be more or less subject, goes far to explain many of A.A.'s failures; also many of our 'slippees' and so-called 'unhappy sobriety' people."

He was to write "Hard evidence has long since been under accumulation that schizophrenia and schizophrenic tendencies are primarily organic in origin." Bill W. continues "Fortunately a powerful counteractive to schizophrenia and to schizo tendencies has been discovered in massive vitamin B-3 – niacin and/or nicotinamide. When given in doses of three grams and sometimes more daily, the effect of B-3 is very considerable on longstanding mental hospital patients" [underlines are in original].

He continues "More recently devised urine and psychological tests are now disclosing the presence of the schizophrenia toxin in a vast number of cases hitherto undiagnosed, thus raising the probable incidence of the malady to several times the one percent usually estimated for the total world population [underlines are in original].

Bill had discovered the works of two doctors, Hoffer and Osmond, that had been experimenting with Niacin treatments for schizophrenia. At the time Bill wrote this brochure, Dr. Abram Hoffer was the Director of Psychiatric Research in the Department of Public Health at University Hospital in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Dr. Osmond was the Director of the Bureau of Research in Neurology and Psychiatry for the State of New Jersey. Building upon Hoffer's and Osmond's research and experiences, Bill reported that he had witnessed "thirty of my friends" to have had positive results from niacin treatments. Consequently, he was writing A

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Communication to A.A. Physicians solely for the purposes of reaching professionals in the field that that may have already been exposed to Bill through his talks to the AMA and to professional psychiatrists. Thus, his brochure was not meant to influence or reach members of A.A nor represent any opinion of the GSO in New York.

“We may be witnessing a remarkable breakthrough in the field of mental health; and also one of great relevance to all who are suffering from alcoholism or its sometimes ‘unhappy’ aftermath. Therefore, it is to be hoped that in coming pages you who are A.A. physicians will find something for your high interest and direct participation.”

Canadian Dr. Abram Hoffer (1917-2009) had quite a resume, as along with his theories on niacin for alcoholism, he was also involved with previous LSD treatments to treat alcoholism. A web site <http://psychedelicresearch.org> credits Osmond and Hoffer with coining the term “hallucinogens” in 1954. Britain’s Dr. Humphry Osmond (1917-2004) is credited in Wikipedia as inventing the word “psychedelic” at a meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences in 1957. Osmond had moved to Canada in 1951, and by 1952 was collaborating with Hoffer. It was Osmond who provided friend of A.A. Aldous Huxley mescaline in 1953. Osmond claimed a 50 percent success rate with curing alcoholics of alcoholism in the late 50’s when he treated them with LSD. Dr. Osmond wrote eleven books and was widely published during his life.

Today’s medical and psychiatric communities have evolved in other directions than Hoffer and Osmond. While it is fair to say that some of the experimentation described with LSD and niacin look rather bizarre using today’s standards, aren’t the issues facing us in Alcoholics Anonymous very similar to what Hoffer and Osmond were researching and on which Bill W. had been experiencing? Bill Wilson suffered from bouts of severe depression himself, and consequently, couldn’t he also be described sometimes as one of the unhappy alcoholics?

Bill Wilson wrote probably his most famous *Grapevine* article “Emotional Sobriety” in 1958. He admitted that in the previous autumn “depression, having no really rational cause at all, almost took me to the cleaners. I began to be scared that I was in for another long chronic spell” [underline added for emphasis]. Robert Fitzgerald, in his book *The Soul of Sponsorship*, wrote that after Bill and Lois had returned from a national tour in 1944, “Bill was plunged into a suicidal depression that would last until 1955.” In 1960, as found on page 92 of *As Bill Sees It*, Bill wrote “When I was tired and couldn’t concentrate, I used to fall back on an affirmation towards life that took the form of simple walking and deep breathing. I sometimes told myself that I couldn’t do even this – that I was too weak. But I learned that this was the point at which I could not give in without still becoming more depressed.”

Whatever the success rate of A.A. is or isn’t, when one views fellow members of A.A., aren’t comparable examples of unhappy sobriety around today? Don’t many members have outside issues that are jeopardizing their sobriety? Aren’t some unhappy people in A.A., some new, some not new, prone to sarcasm, in a revolving door, going nowhere by repeatedly slipping or not changing? Aren’t some others that have an idiot for a sponsor, themselves, literally just

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walking the plank on to the next drink? How many members of A.A. with many years without a drink will drink again? Are the reasons only spiritual? What else might be involved?

Science has had nearly six decades to advance since Bill Wilson wrote this brochure. Yet we still live in a culture where “somber” often is considered to be a synonym for “sober.” Earl H. claims that sobriety is “the best buzz there is.” Fortunately, many in the program of A.A. agree. Yet current events lead us to believe that there are at least as many depressed, or anxious, or unhappy people today as ever.

Some have said Bill W. continued to seek when he already had discovered and had communicated the answer. Nevertheless, can't very much also be learned from mistakes and/or failed experiments as well? His association with Hoffer and Osmond document just how far out in front of most people Bill W. was and how willing he was to participate in seeking out new approaches. Searching for such alternatives seems to be a very noble pursuit when today we're left with many of the same questions and arguably no better results.

Besides, aren't there advertised cures and fixes around for alcoholism today that are rather doubtful at best and preposterous at worst?

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