

DR. ALVAREZ SAYS:

Addicts Find Cures in Synanon Houses

BY DR. WALTER C. ALVAREZ

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I was just reading a release by David Deitch, who says he once was considered an incurable drug addict. Now straightened out, he is helping many addicts to get well.

He is co-director of Synanon House in Westport, Conn. Original Synanon Houses are in Santa Monica. There 150 ex-addicts are housed in dormitories and apartments. Other Synanon groups are located in San Diego, Reno, in the Nevada State Prison and in San Francisco.

The organization was founded by Charles E. Dederich. It is much like that of Alcoholics Anonymous and works in much the same way. The secret of success is that the people who are getting addicts off their drugs once were addicts themselves. The very fact that they are well again — that they are useful in this world and not dependent as they used to be on a drug—gives great hope to a person who wants to start a new life.

I read that at Synanon, an addict who comes in must immediately kick his habit, "cold turkey." This means without the help of any drugs. I have watched addicts "sweating it out," and obviously as they do this, they suffer a great deal.

Must Have Will

Interestingly, some of those who did not do well in Synanon admitted later that their trouble was that they only "wanted to want to quit." Doubtless much of Synanon's success comes from the fact that "cured" men go out through the state to lecture and help other "junkies" to decide to "kick the habit."

In Synanon the members live under a discipline that most of them have never known, and discipline is good for them. Also, as Dr. Karl Menninger once said, these people are helped by "the atmosphere of people getting well."

The Synanon prayer is, "Let me be honest . . . seek responsibility . . . understand rather than be understood . . . have faith in myself and my fellow men . . . love rather than be loved . . . give rather than receive."

One trouble with people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs is that they often are colossally selfish, so much so that it doesn't bother them that they are ruining the lives of a wife and perhaps several children. The members of Synanon have sessions in which they frankly confess their sins. If a man refuses to accept the truth about himself, it is obvious that he is not likely to get well.

Also, members of the group will know it if a man is using a little pain or some illness as an excuse for continuing with his drug. Also they will know if a man is continuing to use his drug because he thinks it will make him a "great guy," or he is taking it in order to get a "kick."

As yet, Synanon, which is about the only group that can "cure" these people, is not receiving any financial help from any government

laboratories, 489 Fifth Ave., New York.

I just read that in New York City alone, a medical official estimated there are at least 40,000 addicts—probably many more. Some believe that three-fourths of the petty crime in New York is committed by drug addicts. I have read estimates that today there are 150,000 narcotic addicts in the whole country.

By last May, Synanon was

providing housing and treatment for more than 400 persons. Most physicians with any experience realize that the usual treatment for drug addiction does not work. Nine in 10 of the people on leaving a hospital go right back to the habit. Addicts generally, after they leave the Synanon apartment, try to live nearby or to come back in the evenings. Friendly support helps them to keep

from slipping. The leaders of Synanon say that it usually takes four years to completely rebuild a broken life.

The marvelous thing to a physician like me is that at last someone has found a

method of really getting an addict off of his drug and back into a useful life. And a wonderful thought is that these "cured" people will then start helping other "junkies" to get well.