



“Living in Freedom from Alcohol and / or Drug Addiction”

40 years

1973 - 2013

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A unplanned meeting in Akron, Ohio in 1935 between two men, Bill W. and Dr Bob, both of whom were termed "hopeless" alcoholics, began a programme of recovery that has helped millions find sobriety and serenity.

The meeting between Bill W. and Dr Bob laid the foundation for Alcoholics Anonymous, and other 12 Step Recovery Programmes, and was eventually mirrored in a chance meeting in a London street in the early 1970s between Martin K. and an American doctor, Jim W..

Martin K. noticed that the American visitor seemed to be a little disorientated so he approached him and asked if he could help. Jim W. replied that he was looking for a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, which, he understood, was being held nearby. Martin K. said to Jim W. that he was on his way to that meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous!

The connection between these two men led Martin to discover IDAA – International Doctors in Alcoholic Anonymous – and formed the germ of an idea in his mind that something similar could happen in the UK.

In 1973, Martin K. met with Seamus H., another alcoholic doctor, in London and it was from that meeting that the British Doctors and Dentists Group emerged history repeats!

As the parallels are so powerful, it is worth remembering that membership of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other drug related 12 Step programmes, by Doctors and Dentists with addiction to alcohol and / or drugs has underpinned the success of the British Doctors and Dentists Group over the last 40 years!

The untreated chemically dependent / addicted dentist or doctor can eventually suffer GDC / GMC investigation, loss of registration, loss of income, financial worries, divorce, emotional damage to children, involvement with the police, Court appearances, loss of self worth, suicide and premature death!

However, alcohol and/or drug addicted doctors and dentists can be treated with favourable outcomes. They need not fear treatment - it can return them to a fulfilled and productive professional career and provide the means to restore relationships.

This is where the British Doctors and Dentists Group, whilst not a treatment facility, can offer so much help and support.

When Martin K. & Seamus H. met in London on Saturday, 29 September 1973, they had much in common as they entered recovery from an addiction to alcohol.

They discovered that they were experiencing similar personal, family and professional issues in their recovery and that each could relate to the other's issues because they had similar feelings arising from their own issues.

They found that meeting regularly on Saturday evenings, and sharing these feelings and problems with each other in an open and honest way, and in a safe and non-judgemental environment, enabled them to work through their feelings and issues and come to terms with the effects of their addiction on their personal, family and professional lives.

These monthly Saturday evening meetings were in addition to regularly attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

These early meetings were held in The Royal Automobile Club in London and, as the club was a 'gentlemen only' club, our early lady members were disguised, secreted into the building and confined to the room in which the meetings took place: the disguised lady members were never uncovered although there were a few near-miss occasions!

Over the next few months, a few other doctors, known to be in recovery from alcohol addiction, were invited to join the founders. To the founders' surprise, these newcomers continued to attend regularly and some were willing to travel extremely long distances to attend the Saturday evening meetings: some even travelled from the north of England.

In 1975, Dr Max Glatt, a Psychiatrist in St Bernard's Hospital, London, wrote a letter to the Lancet about alcoholism within the medical profession and of a recently formed group of recovering alcoholic doctors which met monthly in London. He voiced the opinion that "doctors, concerned about their drinking problem, should find this doctors' group extremely helpful" and so it has proved to be! Max Glatt eventually became an Honorary Member of BDDG!

This was the genesis of the London Group!

Dentists, who have much in common in recovery with their medical counterparts, were invited to join the London Group in 1977.

The Group was also opened to medical and dental practitioners who are addicted to drugs (prescription and non-prescription).

The British Doctors and Dentists Group was finally formed! (www.bddg.org)

As the numbers increased, larger accommodation was needed for the meeting in London which then transferred to The Charing Cross Hotel, London, where the meeting was held monthly until late 2007 (www.bddg-london.org).

This early experience in London showed that, not only was there a need for a London based Group, but that there was probably a need for similar groups throughout all parts of the country.

Over the years, meetings have been gradually established all over the United Kingdom and also in Ireland. BDDG is also strongly supported by IDAA – International Doctors in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Currently, there are around 800 members scattered throughout the United Kingdom, meeting in 17 active groups with most groups holding monthly meetings: a Convention is held annually.

Rarely does a month go by without enquiries being made, either to local Group Secretaries or to our National Secretary, by a drinking / using addict doctor or dentist, a spouse, relative or professional partner.

In 1983, Rev. Leslie Virgo was asked to run a series of Workshops at the 1983 Convention for the family members of alcoholic and drug addicted doctors and dentists and also to provide counselling sessions: this recognised that addictions are family diseases!

From this grew the Families Group of BDDG (www.bddgfamilies.org.uk) with which Leslie was closely associated until retiring as Facilitator to the Group in February 2011, prior to moving back to Gloucestershire, the county of his birth: he died on 6 August 2013. Leslie was made an Honorary Member of BDDG in 2011.

The BDDG Families Group is an independent self-help group which offers help and support for all family members who are suffering, or have suffered, from the effects of a doctor's or dentist's alcohol or drug addiction.

The BDDG Families Groups meet monthly, in adjacent rooms, at the same time as BDDG meetings.

When attempts at helping the drinking doctor or dentist have apparently failed, if the spouse attends Families Group meetings, very often the partner doctor or dentist eventually joins BDDG. Like their partners in BDDG who are also members of AA or NA, many family members also become involved in Al-Anon (a fellowship for relatives and friends of alcoholics) or Families Anon (a fellowship for relatives and friends concerned about the use of drugs) and this also gives helpful support.

Unfortunately, a high percentage of doctors' and dentists' marriages have encountered difficulties before the doctor or dentist comes into recovery, but, in recovery, reconciliation is frequently possible.

Many colleagues have faced the breakup of their marriage or relationship, the loss of the trust and confidence of their colleagues, financial ruin and the loss of a career following investigation by their regulatory bodies because of their addiction to alcohol and / or drugs.

Many of our medical and dental colleagues owe their lives, the restoration of relationships and careers to their involvement in the British Doctors and Dentists Group where they have been able to be honest with themselves, and others, about their relationship with alcohol and / or drugs and taken appropriate action to turn their lives around and live without the need for alcohol and / or drugs.

Martin K. produced a number of newsletters which document the early development of the British Doctors and Dentists Group.

These newsletters were published in 1983, 1985 & 1994 and circulated throughout the membership of BDDG.

They are now available for download from the BDDG History page on the BDDG–London website (www.bddg-london.org/?page_id=46).

These newsletters make interesting reading as they contain testimonials from early members of BDDG in the days before we had the additional support of The Dentists Health Support Programme (1982), The Sick Doctors Trust (1996) and the Practitioner Health Programme (2009).

Over the years, many of our colleagues have turned their lives around, re-established relationships and careers with the help and support of other members of BDDG and live a 'normal' life free of alcohol and/or drugs.

We have so much for which to be grateful!

[A reminder of the effects of alcohol addiction!](#)



HJB/BDDG-London/bddg@40 - 2013