

Recovery Solutions

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Treatment of Mood Disorders in Addiction

By Paul D. Corona, MD

How to Work the 12 Steps with SUCCESS

By Father Joseph C. Martin
Founder of Kelly Productions, Inc.

Another Year Calls to Us

By Karen Casey, Ph.D

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Proven
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The Risk of Stimulants Abuse in TEENAGERS

By Steven L. Jaffe, M.D.,
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The Recovery Model of His Generation

John Shegerian

Founder of Addicted.com

By Olasimbo Olanusi, MD, FASAM



JOHN SHEGERIAN

The Recovery Model of His Generation

Founder of Addicted.com

By Simbo Olanusi, MD, FASAM



Simbo: You are a good role model for the recovery community. Your story has become one of success, inspiration and hope. But beyond that, you are helping others find hope, healing and a future through your immense contributions to the recovery community and society.

Shegerian is the founder of Addicted.com, a website designed to provide addiction recovery resources and tools for addicts, family members and friends throughout the world-wide Internet community.

Shegerian is Chairman and CEO of Electronic Recyclers, Inc. (ERI). Established in 2002, ERI is an Electronic Waste collector and recycler, specializing in the environmentally safe and socially responsible dismantling of electronic items such as computers, televisions and monitors. Shegerian has made a point of offering reformed convicts a second chance and many of the employees at ERI are realizing the dream of a “recycled life” as a result of Shegerian’s compassion.

John S. Shegerian, has been named a recipient of the prestigious Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Award, presented by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Committee at their

annual Commemoration Program held on January 21,2008 at the William Saroyan Theatre.

So I really thank you for all you do for the recovery community and humanity at large.

John: This is not done alone, no one does this alone. This morning, I am going to be receiving a Martin Luther King award, of which I am very honored. There are two things that I want to share with you. There are two philosophies I live my life by.

The first one is a very short poem of Mohammed Ali “**Me and We**” principle

I can’t help other people get well unless I’m talking the talk and walking the walk.

The same thing goes for you, if you didn’t have the credibility that you have, you can’t take the “me” of Dr. Olanusi and make it we. You and I are will not be able to make our **Me into a We** in the recovery community unless we have the credibility in our community.

The second one is my favorite quote by Martin Luther King “*Everyone can be great because everyone can serve*”. I have this quote on my web site and is also hanging on the wall in my office. The amazing thing about him was that before he was ever a Civil Rights Leader, he was a Reverend. Whatever our mission is on this planet, our service is to use the skill and fulfill the services that we are here for. That is how I live on a regular basis.

Those two quotes stick in my mind the most and that it is not about me, it is about the “we”. And this is more about a mission, a service that we are here to accomplish. As long as we are here, we are here for a service. That is how I approach every morning when I wake up.

Simbo: That is so awesome; one of my life’s governing principles is to be a giver and not a taker.

My parents made every opportunity available to me and

so I eagerly give to others because there is much more blessing in giving than receiving. The mission and vision of the magazine is to educate the people about the disease of addiction and provide resources for the recovery community.

You are one of the shining examples that recovery is alive and well today.

Can you briefly tell us about your past history of addiction?

John: I did not realize it until 2000 or 2001 how sick I had become and how my life was out of control. I was a sex addict and I had had this addiction for many years. I did not realize

I realized that once you get out of that wonderful, safe cocoon that exists in rehab setting, as the driver takes you in the van back to the airport, so much of the real world starts coming at you

that it was an addiction and I did not realize how horribly it had taken over my life. I saw something on television about a couple of very prominent professionals that worked at the Meadows in Wickenburg, Arizona. They had specialized in helping people overcome this disease, so I called the Meadows and got admitted.

Simbo: It is one thing to live a transformed recovery lifestyle in rehab and another to live it in the real world.

How easy was it for you to continue living this transformed recovery lifestyle once you were out of rehab?

John: I realized that once you get out of that wonderful, safe cocoon that exists in rehab setting, as the driver takes you in the van back to the airport, so much of the real world starts coming at you already, the billboards, the advertisements and then you get into the airport and all the triggers and the potholes of life that have tripped up people like me before are in front of me again. Sex is such a big part of our society, so men and women in the middle of the summer walk around provocatively because we have been taught and learned together to train ourselves that sex is a big thing and if sex sells then it must be good to look sexy and to be provocative and as women and men we are supposed to encourage it.

In the same manner, an alcoholic on his way home from a rehab facility, on getting to the airport, finds the bars are right there and people are drinking in the middle of the day and night. So, there are a million different triggers and I was

thinking to myself, how do people really make it when you are out of rehab? I have friends that have left the Meadows and went back to New York and on the plane gotten drunk, landed at JFK Airport and could not even walk off the plane. They waited at the airport until they got over the intoxicating effects of alcohol and again, got on another plane and returned back to the rehab facility in Arizona.

Simbo: How did you survive through all these temptations in early recovery?

John: I was very blessed. I found Dr. Doug, who became my ongoing counselor. He had a different approach to rehab. He said addicts that go to rehab, it is a great experience, a great beginning of what is going to become a continuance of wellness. But you just do not go 35 days after 10 or 20 or 30 years of addictive behavior in a certain addiction all of sudden, you walk out free and clear. It just does not work that way. It is about unlearning the bad

habits acquired over many years and learning new, healthy habits. All of these take time and commitment on a daily basis.

Simbo: What are the golden recovery lessons that you live by that has helped you to live a sustained life of recovery?

John: My first goal everyday goes back to the “we and the me”. I cannot help anybody, I cannot be a good husband, a good father, a good business leader a good inspiration if I do not make sure that I take care of myself and that my recovery is secure.

I have to do the me first everyday in terms of making sure that I do not go and do anything that I am not supposed to be doing. I take care of myself, spiritually, physically and mentally, to me it is a three-prong approach. You just cannot be spiritually well and not be taking care of yourself physically or mentally and just think you are going to be well. So I make my priorities, spiritually for me, God is first and my recovery is predicated upon turning myself over everyday and making sure that I never ever let my circumstances become bigger than me. I never let myself be overwhelmed anymore.

Simbo: That is so true. Because the disease of addiction impacts the spiritual, physical, emotional and social aspects of people’s life. In others, to have a full recovery lifestyle, all of these areas have to be adequately addressed.

We all know when people get out there in the real world, as someone in recovery there are so many odds that confront

people in recovery such as stigma, discrimination and so on.
Did you encounter any of these odds?

John: Sure, you know admitting that you are an addict in a world that still has not recognized addiction as a legitimate disease still creates a stigma. I think we are right now in 2008 at an inflection point. That it is a wonderful inflection point is why I am honored and blessed that you are doing this article. When I was a little boy, there were people dying of breast cancer. Or people dying of prostate cancer. But until Betty Ford put a face to breast cancer or other celebrities put a face on it like Cheryl Crowe or other wonderful brave people, until people put a face on it, it was not a recognized disease, now it is. Same thing, when Bob Dole and Gerald S. and Mike Milken put a face to prostate cancer, people were dying of it, but people did not recognize it and then the same thing until Magic Johnson came out and said "I have AIDS", no one knew anybody with AIDS and as soon as he said that, everybody knew somebody. I believe right now that the disease of addiction is about to get that same spotlight with brave people like Jamie Lee Curtis and other celebrities, Robert Downey Jr., Mel Gibson and Brett Favre, who played in the NFL championship, who went to rehab and recovered from painkiller addiction. The more people that are recognizable who are walking the walk and talking the talk, addiction is now going to be seen a legitimate disease that people can achieve legitimate wellness from, but historically, even back 5 or 6 years ago when I started getting well, there was horrible stigma to it. I think those stigmas still exist. You have to stop worrying about what people think. If people do not want to associate with you, be your friend or do business with you because you are an admitted addict and you are in recovery, then that is on them, that has nothing to do with you. That is their loss.

Simbo: That is so true and that is actually how society reacts to disease when they do not know much about it. History recorded the same thing with the disease of Leprosy. In the past, people who suffered from Leprosy were banished and ostracized from their communities due to limited knowledge about the disease.

But as science proved that it is a disease and it can be treated and people get well from it, all the stigma and shame associated with the disease started to diminish and now all that has become history.

It is so amazing that you mentioned the analogy of the breast cancer people because those people come out and say "hey I am a survivor of breast cancer." Most people with addictions shy away from openly admitting about their past history of addiction, especially when they have become real successful

in their community, because of the stigma. This is why I appreciate what you are doing for the recovery community.

You are a wonderful role model. People think that addiction is just a revolving door, people never recover. Once an addict, always an addict. You and I know that is not the truth. In fact, I see how some of my patients who have embraced treatment and the principles of recovery get well and better each day. They have transformed their lives and become responsible members of society and contribute immensely to the recovery community and even to the world at large.

How did you beat those odds and become the success that you are today?

John: I grew up on welfare in Queens, New York, we did not have a lot and it is a feeling of helplessness, which is really the same feeling you have when you are addicted - the feeling of helplessness, you do not know what is going to happen and your life is out of control. When I tried to overcome problems in my life and mostly in business, whenever I hit a pothole in the road or someone told me, "no, you can't", I always turned around and I said to myself "yes, I can". I took my business experience and applied it to getting well.

And when I started getting well, many people walked out of my life. People who said they were my friends, my business associates. Many people left my life that never came back, but some did. All I kept saying to myself is all of that stuff is peripheral, I kept on saying: yes I can, I am going to get well, yes I can and in my darkest moments, I just said to myself yes I can and if I can everybody else can also.

Simbo: Besides being a resounding successful business man, what would you say are the other rewards that a lifestyle of recovery has blessed you with?

John: I have my life back. You know what happens is people sometimes say how did your family, your wife take all this, you were cheating on her? I say, that is correct, and when you start getting well, what you really realize is that when you are sick with addiction you cheat on your children, your wife and your business. But most importantly, you are cheating yourself out of a life and when you start to get well and truly well you get your life back. It is no life when you are an addict, no matter what your addiction. Every addict that I have met whether food, sex, gambling, drugs or alcohol, anything, their life is not theirs anymore. For the ability to be able to contribute to your family, community and business, it is like I always look at it like when I was living with my addiction. It is like being in the most dense fog, you can barely see three inches in front of your face. And everyday, as you transform,

you are getting more well and the fog lifts until the day you wake up every morning and you see the day for what it is, perfectly clear. And go to bed at night, you see the day that just happened and see it for what it was perfectly clear. And to me then, that is the blessing from getting well from addiction, you get to deal with every situation both good and bad that comes your way from a position of clarity and not being in the fog of addiction.

Simbo: Let's go back to *Addicted.com* which is one of the most successful online recovery resources available today.

What really inspired you to be the founder of *Addicted.com*?

John: Well, it was when I was in rehab and when I got out, I went online and the wonderful part of being online is that it is anonymous. The Internet helps fuel, and it is still continuing to fuel, the rise of gambling addiction, pornography, sex addiction and drug addiction in the world today. When I was a little boy, the biggest thing I could acquire in terms of pornography was *Playboy Magazine*. Now I have a 15 year old son and he can go online and see anything with a live person. So to me, if the Internet was going to be a curse, I figured let's turn the democratization of the information into a blessing. Let us take all of the information we can find on addiction on and offline and put it into a website and keep updating the information daily and connect people together.

Addicted.com is not a perfect website, as I speak with you today, I am not done with it. A website is a living organism that is fluid and constantly evolving, there is so much more I want to do with it and that we are going to do with it, but as it stands today, on a bad day we have 7 – 8 thousand people on our site and on a good day we get 14 or 15 thousand people a day. With the zip code locator and the articles and testimonies that people give and the videos that we have, we have created a social networking place where people can be anonymous if they want or not, find hope. And that to me is a blessing. Let us say on a bad day, seven thousand come to the website, but let us say only 100 that day get help and six thousand and nine hundred had fun and left a message and helped mom. 100 people found help, just think what a ministry, what a service, in a bad day 100 people find help, or go to a doctor, called an 800 number and find a friendly voice to talk to and get a referral to a good clinic, we are doing something that is helping people get well and reclaim their lives.

Simbo: When people get online, besides being able to connect with other people, what are the other resources that are available for people who visit the website of *Addicted.com*?

John: They can take a Self Test or give a Self Test to a loved one and find out if that person is really sick or not. Some people do not even know they have a sickness. They know something is wrong with them, but they do not know what it is. So they self test on it. There is lots of news and information that comes from the uploads from the addiction field everyday. We have an 800 number that people can call if they are desperate and they need to find a place immediately for someone they know or love or are concerned about. We have more blogs that we are going to be putting up and a media resource center in the next 30 days, which will generate a more robust forum area.

Simbo: What are the future goals and aspirations you have for the web site?

John: My dream is that on a bad day, a hundred thousand people will visit our web site and that is going to come in future. We have doubled our traffic every six months and I think in the next six months we are going to double again. We are right on the verge of making a couple of major deals with some major Internet companies that will double our traffic.

We are about to finish off the deals with some rental properties. Communities that already have 12, 15 or 18 million registered users and they know that a great segment of their populations have addiction problems, they are going to make us the primary addiction web source and are going to tie in and deliver help more directly to more community. You know this better than anyone Dr, the interesting part about this is the more successful we become as a web site and the more people that use it and leave information and leaves tips for wellness and reads the blog or leave their testimony, the more relevant the site is. Because you can then reach out and become a beacon of hope for more people. That is the whole goal. More traffic creates more energy, which then creates a more relevant site because more people leave their personal testimonies or stories. That is what we are really shooting for and that is the future. The other future goal is that we are in negotiations to do a television show called *Addicted*. This was way before celebrity rehab. I wrote this show 3 or 4 years ago. I registered it out in Hollywood. I do not make any money from this and I do not want any money from it. What has happened was from the rise of the show *Intervention* and *Intervention* takes people right to the door of rehab, but it is so interesting to see how real rehab works. We would actually show how it really works from the inside out and would tie that show into our website. People from rehab would be able to blog on our website from rehab and tell us how the process is working and share with the world the good and the bad of what they are experiencing and share the hope that, if you want it you can

get it. If you want to be well, then you can get wellness.

So again to me, the more we can connect people to wellness opportunities, the more we can connect people to other people that are recovering, then we are accomplishing something. I never say I am perfect, I never say that the web site is perfect, but it is connecting people. I get emails all the time that from people saying thank you, thank you, and thank you!

Simbo: And that is really exciting. To know that you are doing something so worthy and contributing something so meaningful into the lives of people.

I keep saying this is one of the most rewarding fields, because you see people whose lives are transformed and over the course of time, the difference is as clear as night and day.

My dream is that on a bad day, a hundred thousand people will visit our web site and that is going to come in the future

John: So, while you are sleeping, someone picks up one of your magazines and they read the story of inspiration and they wake up the next morning and realize *I can do this too*. That is how you can sleep. Because of your magazine, you get to affect a person. I feel the same way; while I am sleeping, because we put out that information. If someone is reading it at 2 in the morning it is because they are desperate and if they do not do drugs that they were going to do at 3 in the morning, because they were online and they found the website. Then I feel like we are accomplishing something, or doing something and helping people and that's a blessing. For you and for me, to have the opportunity to even help people is a blessing.

Simbo: Most people think that addiction happens to people only in the ghetto or with negative backgrounds, but research has shown that addiction is an equal opportunity disease, it does not respect the race, creed or color.

Do you have any comments about the fact that celebrities are suffering from addiction?

John: It does not matter, we both know that addiction goes right across every race and economic sector. If we take the Internet and we use it for the good that it was created for, we can start reversing those trends. But going back to those celebrities, celebrities that have really gotten well and are really walking the walk when they come out and talk the talk create beacons of hope. However, unfortunately today, celebrities

are the ones that set the social tones of our society. The heroes do not exist anymore. When I was a child, it was JFK, it was Martin Luther King, those days are gone. It is now celebrities, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton and Lindsey Lohan. Well, that is a curse and a blessing also. If they are doing bad things, it is a curse because they are being a bad example to America's and world's youth. But when they find their way and do good things like Angelina Jolie and Oprah Winfrey and the great things that they have done with their lives and they give back. What they have done will also become beacons of light and hope that we can point to. Same thing in the addiction world, when Jamie Lee Curtis goes on Larry King and says "I am a junky, I am in recovery." That is a beacon of hope. And now what will happen from that is more people like you and me are getting the opportunity to speak out.

Saying hey, I am just a regular person, never in a movie, never a celebrity, but addiction as you say cuts across all lines. And yes, I wear a suit everyday but at one point, I was very sick. Now I am well and so you can be too.

Simbo: Does *Addicted.com* have any plans to reach out to any of these celebrities?

John: We are in negotiation with some celebrities to write a daily blog on our website or a weekly blog about their wellness and how they got well. There are many people that are wanting to give back in the celebrity world and even politicians and other well-known public figures that we are talking to about taking that role. I believe that will happen in the near future.

Simbo: What kind of encouragement do you have for someone still struggling with addiction, saying what does recovery have in it for me? Addiction is all I know, that is where I get comfort from my pain and is a way to escape from my problem?

John: I do not know if I have a word of advice for them. But what I always try to tell people is, no matter how bad you think your situation is, I was as sick as any horrible addict has been sick and I got well and if I got well, so can you. Anyone can get well if you want it and when you get well, your life comes back to you. It is a great world, you can do so much. Everybody has a great life to lead and a great story to tell. There is hope all over the place. We can find and highlight the amazing stories from all over. And to me, that is the blessing that we get to walk the walk together and we get to be an inspiration together from all different colors and all different backgrounds, that is the blessing that comes from what we are doing. ■