Books that get to you: Bibliotherapy in addictions

Judit H. Ward

William Bejarano
Center of Alcohol Studies
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Mária Palotai
National Health Center
Budapest

Beatrix Kovács
National Health Center
Budapest

Guided reading, often referred to as bibliotherapy, has been shown to be an effective complementary method in recovery. In an attempt to define bibliotherapy for addictions as a theoretical model, the authors discovered significant differences in the interpretations and applications across the disciplines and countries. Subsections of bibliotherapeutic practice include prescription-based self-help bibliotherapy (mostly in the US); creative bibliotherapy, which uses reading and writing in a creative way (Europe), and informal bibliotherapy with a strong social element such as reading groups and library recommendations (both US and Europe).

Librarians offer services and recommend resources without passing judgment. Through this process, they often become “accidental bibliotherapists” (Brewster, 2009). Bibliotherapy environments range from mental health facilities to public libraries. Potential titles include manuals, guidebooks and workbooks written by addiction professionals; self-help books; and literary classics, memoirs, and pop culture titles. Diverse audiences include addicts, those in recovery, family members, and/or other affected parties who wish to remain anonymous while seeking authoritative sources on the topic.

In a collaborative effort, the authors compare current practical uses of bibliotherapy in addictions in North America and Europe. Starting in 1976 in Hungary, bibliotherapy was first used in a psychiatric rehab center with 10-15 recovering alcoholic inpatients by a physician, staff, and a librarian. Short stories were used to focus on three main subthemes: managing everyday life, human relations, and complex moral issues (Bartos, 1980).

In 2015, the Center of Alcohol Studies Library was awarded a two-year ALA Carnegie-Whitney grant to develop a comprehensive tool to assist those in recovery by offering appropriate reading material. The project, called Reading for Recovery (R4R), aims to bridge the gap in access and discoverability between the
readers in need and the books that can enhance active coping. With its online annotated bibliographic records arranged in a searchable database, this tool will address a critical information gap.

This poster also aims to generate interest among the international members of SALIS, seeking further collaboration and exposure to those with similar endeavors across cultures. The authors are committed to involving SALIS librarians in the project.

References


Bartos, É. (1980). Experiment to use bibliotherapy with alcohol patients in Hungary [In Hungarian]. Alkohológia, 11(4), 204-205.