

INTRODUCTION

In this issue we pay tribute to C. Everett Koop who, as Surgeon General of the United States (1982-89), legitimated self-help/mutual aid as a generalized information and support phenomena that contributes to the public's health. In the 1980s, while millions of Americans participated in self-help groups and self-help organizations for hundreds of chronic diseases, genetic disorders, disabling conditions, life transitions, mental health problems, and stigmatizing social and economic conditions, physicians and other health professionals were largely unaware of the self-help/mutual aid social movement and its positive impacts. Now, in the 21st century, self-help groups and support groups are routinely recognized by health professionals as invaluable supplements to mainstream medical care, thanks to the assistance Dr. C. Everett Koop and others like him gave to the movement.

This issue signals major changes to the *Journal*. In keeping with the International title of the *Journal*, a variety of efforts are underway to increase the global representation of publications, viewpoints, and Editorial Board members. In this issue we have articles and researchers from Canada, England, Hungary, Norway, Japan, Australia, and the United States. A second change will be to expand the role of the voice of the practitioner—whether a self-help leader, a member, or a health professional who sympathizes with self-help/mutual aid as staff of a self-help resource center or as a clinician who promotes and assists autonomous self-help groups and organizations. The original vision of the *Journal* was to have a space where the researcher and practitioner would intersect and learn from each other, but over the years the practitioner's voice has been infrequently represented in the *Journal*. The practitioner will be given voice in Experience Reports which will be first person narratives of a practitioner.

To highlight the expanded role of the practitioner, two Experience Reports are at the beginning of this issue. I also encourage more practitioners to tell us about his/her experiences in developing and supporting innovative self-help/mutual aid. In the first Experience Report, Audrey Borden, a lesbian in recovery

from alcohol problems, tells us about her journey to learn about how gays and lesbians were treated in the early Alcoholics Anonymous groups of the 1940s and 1950s through the present—her interviewing and research resulted in a published book and a change of career. The second Experience Report is by Michael Seltzer, a Norwegian cultural anthropologist who worked with Gabor Keleman, M.D., a psychiatrist who directed a residential program for alcohol and drug addicts in Hungary that relied extensively on the 12-step philosophy and practices of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous; their experiences describe how recovery from drug addiction was complicated by the double legacy of distrust and cynicism from addiction and from decades of Soviet Communistic ideology and oppression. Developing and practicing rituals of mutual aid were vital to recovery.

Two research articles explore issues of interest to practitioners. While knowledge of people's use of the internet for support and information is growing, we still know little about how self-help groups form on the internet, how they function, and with what impact. Ed Freeman, Chris Barker, and Nancy Pistrang from London, drawing on a previously reported research project, posed here the research question of whether college students with psychological and academic problems will use online support groups provided by their university. They found that online resources are a viable method for facilitating self-help for college students.

The second issue of concern to practitioners is whether or not the guardian, surrogate, or spokesperson for those with disabilities with limited communication capacity can adequately represent the needs and wishes of those with disabilities. Or, should attempts be made to hear the voice of the inarticulate, so to speak? Irene Carter and Robert Wilson in Canada asked whether parents of children with autism can adequately represent their needs and reactions to participation in online and face-to-face self-help groups in comparison with high functioning autistic children who speak on their own behalf. The short answer is no—Carter and Wilson delineate some subtle and not so subtle differences between the reactions of high functioning children with autism and those of parents with autistic children to what they need and want in face-to-face self-help groups versus online groups.

The final article “Research on Self-Help Organizations in Japan: Working with a Sense of Duty (*“giri”*),” is a methodological examination of how researchers obtain access to and develop trust in working with a self-help organization, a rarely considered methodological issue. Tomofumi Oka of Sophia University in Tokyo and his Australian colleague Richard Dean Chenhall consider the complex and intricate negotiations that Japanese researchers go through in order to approach a self-help group they are interested in studying and the continuing obligations researchers incur from studying such a group in Japan. Three case studies of researchers' relationships with self-help leaders are presented to illustrate the obligations (*“giri”*) involved. While the Japanese research situation

may be extreme in some senses, the methodological issues raised are valid in all research situations deserving further attention in other societal contexts.

The issue concludes with Mark Chesler's review essay of the book *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* written by the sociologist Micki McGee.

Explicit attention to how the *societal context* affects the research process or the shape and nature of self-help/mutual aid will be another aspect of "globalizing" the *Journal*. Two of the articles in this issue have considered the societal context: first is the Seltzer and Gabor's Experience Report of how the post-communist era in Hungary affects the kind of help drug addicts need to recover; and second is Oka and Chenhall's interesting examination of the obligations researchers incur in studying self-help organizations in Japan. My own international research experiences have shown me that, paradoxically, I gain far more understanding of my local research situation by placing it in and viewing it from a global perspective.

As we embark on the new direction and changes to the *Journal*, we request your support and assistance. Ideas and suggestions for special issues are welcome! New manuscripts of research reports or experience reports submitted for consideration for publication are vital to the health of the *Journal*. Reports of innovative forms of self-help/mutual aid or peer support are of interest. Theoretical or methodological essays on problematic or innovative approaches are solicited for the new Insight feature of the *Journal*. Volunteers to review books, films, or other media are welcome. We welcome suggestions, ideas, research, experience, insights. Join us in this revitalization and globalization of the *Journal*.

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