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Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
Practical, Medical, and Spiritual Guidelines for Daily
Living with Emphysema, Chronic Bronchitis, and
Combination Diagnosis

Mark Jenkins

Foreword by Robert E. Larsen, M.D.

A Hazelden Pocket Health Guide



 HAZELDEN*

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Foreword

For the past sixty years, millions of addicts and alcoholics have stopped using drugs and found new, rewarding lives by following the spiritual principles outlined in Twelve Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous. From a medical perspective, it is not unreasonable to say that Twelve Step programs constitute the gold standard of treatment for the chronic disease of chemical dependency. These programs have been so successful that they are now used to deal with other challenges of a chronic nature, such as overeating, sexual compulsion, gambling, and depression.

The Hazelden Pocket Health Guide series is designed to help patients cope with chronic diseases, specifically, diseases that may be the result of an addiction. The long-term, potentially debilitating illnesses we refer to include chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), hypertension, and liver disease. This series can help patients make use of the same spiritual principles that have enabled so many chemically dependent people to lead full and satisfying lives.

Spirituality and acceptance are powerful tools patients and health care professionals can apply to help deal with disease. In thirty years of medical practice

I have seen many patients with chronic disease who, despite the best physicians and hospitals, have done poorly. Sometimes this was due to the severity of the disease process, but often, the patients' inability to accept the disease and its consequences was of significance. Denial is a common problem in chemically dependent people, but chemical dependency is by no means the only disease in which it plays a major role in the outcome. Denial is common to *every* chronic disease known to medical science and if not dealt with effectively is a major stumbling block to effective treatment.

Despite significant advances in treating diabetes, for instance, at least half of all diabetics fail to follow their diets or to take their medications properly. Many of these patients suffer amputations, kidney failure and dialysis, heart attacks, and blindness partly due to their disease but mostly due to the denial that blinds them to effective treatment of the disease.

Denial and chronic disease can be dealt with by using spiritual principles. Spirituality is not religion, although some people achieve it in traditional religious communities. Spirituality is the concept that each of us has a Higher Power that can help us cope with life. For many this is the traditional God, while for others it may be nature, the recovering community, or a set of guiding principles. Each person has his or

her own concept of a Higher Power. Spirituality is not a particular religious dogma but rather a concept that allows people to feel good about how they live their lives.

Bill Wilson, the cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, described spirituality as the concept that we can do together what we could not do alone. Spirituality is about community and being a part of a greater whole. Spirituality is we *not* me.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) affects millions of people worldwide every year. It is characterized by decreased lung function, chronic cough, shortness of breath, and wheezing. Left untreated, COPD can lead to death from heart failure or infection and pneumonia. Patients with COPD frequently find their daily activities curtailed due to difficulty in breathing. COPD is silent in its early years and usually manifests itself when its victims are in their forties and fifties. Unfortunately, many are not aware of this disease until it is too late to reverse its consequences.

The most common cause of COPD is cigarette smoking (nicotine addiction). While only 10 to 15 percent of smokers get COPD, the vast majority who have this disease are, or have been, moderate to heavy

smokers. Other causes of COPD include asthma, environmental factors, and even a genetic defect. Smokers, however, are most commonly affected with COPD, and smoking cessation is absolutely critical in treating this condition.

COPD is a treatable disease, but it is not curable. Treatment, however, can be effective in slowing the disease and helping patients to live productive lives.

Spirituality will not make COPD go away. Using spiritual principles to complement medical therapy will help people cope with the disease. Dealing with denial and learning to coexist with the illness, instead of fighting it, are two of the goals of this work. If patients apply the principles found in these pages and cooperate with their health care providers' treatment plan, they will see an improvement in breathing and in overall quality of life. They will cease to fight the disease and in doing so will begin to know peace.

ROBERT E. LARSEN, M.D.
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Preface

I owe my life to a spiritual program of recovery. My journey started when I joined the recovery community. By following the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (the basis of *all* Twelve Step programs), I found a new life. My career was rebuilt: my relationships with others were mended; my self-esteem was restored.

A natural-born cynic, I was at first astounded when so many of "the Promises" I had been told about came true and in such short order (see pages xix-xx for more on the Promises). By then I had learned not to question but to simply accept such blessings as part of my continuing journey in sobriety.

As a medical writer with several books to my credit, I began to postulate that this spiritual program of recovery from addiction would be a revelation to people with chronic illnesses. After all, the Twelve Steps are a universal plan for living well. Countless groups apply the Twelve Steps to their addictions and conditions everything ranging from Emotions Anonymous to Debtors Anonymous to Gamblers Anonymous to the grandparent of them all, Alcoholics Anonymous. And so I set about writing a book that offers a spiritual program of recovery from chronic illness.

Probably no one needs a guide to living well more than people who suffer from long-term medical conditions that dominate their lives. Chronic illness affects more than ninety million Americans and, according to the American Medical Association, is this nation's foremost health concern. Chronic illness leads to feelings of anger, isolation and loneliness, financial difficulties, compromised personal relationships, and trouble at work. The emotional consequences of a chronic illness are especially profound when the condition is caused by a dependency on a mood-altering substance such as nicotine or alcohol. The Twelve Step program helps people deal with these overwhelming emotions by teaching them how to find their spirituality.

I am hardly the first person to suggest that the Twelve Steps can benefit those with chronic illnesses. Many others whose lives have been transformed by a Twelve Step program have applied these principles to conditions ranging from cancer to AIDS.

However, what has been lacking in these interpretations is a plan for individual conditions. Until now.

This book is part of the Hazelden Pocket Health Guide series of books that adapts the Twelve Steps for those with chronic illnesses in this case, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The book combines specific medical guidelines with a plan to improve

emotional and spiritual well-being. At its core is a program of hope, happiness, and healing.

Above all, this program provides those with chronic illnesses like COPD what they need: the indispensable tools and inspiration to live life one day at a time . . . and to *live it well*.

Introduction

Spirituality:

The Strongest Medicine of All?

Can spirituality help me beat my disease? That's probably the question you're asking yourself. A better question might be, Can the spiritual program this book teaches help me overcome the emotional pain of my disease so I can manage my disease more effectively? The answer to that question is "yes."

A growing body of evidence suggests that spirituality actually helps us stay healthy and recover from illness. How? For a quarter-century doctors have wondered the same thing and now believe they know the answer. Researchers at Harvard's Mind/Body Medical Institute found in extensive laboratory studies that prayer and meditation prerequisites for a sound spiritual life cause a person's body to undergo healthful changes.¹ There is decreased metabolism, heart rate, and rate of breathing, as well as slower brain waves. These changes are the opposite of those induced by stress and are an effective therapy for chronic illnesses. In fact, doctors like those at the Mind/Body

¹ For a brochure describing the Mind/Body Medical Institute, call (617) 632-9525 or visit its Web site at www.mindbody.harvard.edu

Medical Institute believe that a spiritual program that involves prayer and meditation is an effective component of treatment for any disease made worse by stress.

Although skeptics still question whether a spiritual person is more likely to recover from chronic illness than one who is not, of this there is no doubt: spirituality helps chronically ill people cope with the emotional challenges of their condition.

But just what is spirituality anyway? One thing it *isn't* is religion. Although many truly religious people are spiritual, and many spiritual people consider themselves religious, the two concepts are not one and the same. You don't have to be religious to be spiritual. Religion is a formalization of society's relationship with God into rituals and institutions. Spirituality is our inherent belief in the existence of a higher power, energy, or force or what is perceived as God and a feeling of closeness to that entity.

That being is referred to variously within these pages as a Higher Power, a Power greater than ourselves, or Power Greater.

This book advocates the use of the Twelve Steps, a spiritual program founded in the 1930s to help alcoholics recover from the disease of alcoholism. The Twelve Steps can help you "turn over" care of your disease to a Higher Power that is greater than you, that

is wiser than you, and that loves you. And it will help you maintain strength and hope as you live each day with your disease.

You'll learn in depth about the Twelve Steps later in this book. Right now what's important is that you know that recovery from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (usually known by its acronym, COPD) isn't just about addressing the medical aspects of the disease, although you will certainly learn most of what you need to know in these pages. No, recovery from COPD is also about learning to overcome the emotional pain of chronic illness. Only by doing this will you be able to properly manage your disease.

The Twelve Steps will help you overcome your emotional pain by allowing you to recognize what you do and don't have control over. In cooperation with your Higher Power, you have the power to deal with your feelings about your disease and to change the behaviors that caused or exacerbated the condition. You can also take those all-important steps to prevent it from getting worse, such as taking your medication, exercising, avoiding dangerous environments, and, above all, resisting the urge to smoke. The Twelve Steps will also show you how to grow spiritually through prayer and meditation, making amends to others, and spending time in the company of other people with COPD.

There is no cure for COPD, just as there is no cure

for alcoholism and other chronic illnesses. However, the Twelve Steps have provided those who have practiced the principles of the program with the life skills they need to live immensely fulfilling lives in many respects, the kind of spiritual lives they would never have had the opportunity to experience had they not developed a chronic illness.

Despite their popularity, Twelve Step programs are still widely misunderstood in some quarters. Such misunderstandings stand in the way of acceptance by those who could really use them, including people with chronic illnesses such as COPD. Perhaps the most common misunderstanding is that Twelve Step programs are "covers" for religions specifically, Christian groups.

A hasty reading of the Steps may reinforce this impression. However, after reading more carefully, people soon discover that the Steps do not endorse any religion. A person who lives by the Steps could be Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, agnostic, or atheist.

If the Twelve Steps are not a religious program, then they certainly are a spiritual one. The Steps echo what writer Aldous Huxley called the "perennial philosophy" a core set of ideas and practices shared by many religious traditions. The Steps have one major concern, and that is human transformation.

Many of you may already be intimately familiar with a Twelve Step program. Those of you who aren't will discover that it offers a new approach to living. This approach is available to you if you acknowledge your jeopardy and your need to learn to change your behaviors and to improve your state of being.

The spiritual component of this book draws extensively on principles developed by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. Like alcoholism, COPD is a chronic disease that is always with its sufferers to some degree and affects every area of their lives. The extraordinary success achieved by millions of "AAs" can be emulated by those with COPD who follow the Steps suggested in this book.

It is heartening to know that the same Promises which inspire Alcoholics Anonymous members also offer strength and hope to those with COPD who are willing to follow this simple program:

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity