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Comprehensive Holistic Therapeutics to Reward Deficiency Syndrome (RDS): Neuroscience Evidence-Based Modalities

Q: Tell us a little about yourself.

A: My name is John Giordano, I'm a recovering addict and have been in recovery almost 30 years. This upcoming Dec 4 will mark my 30 years in recovery. Actually, how I got into recovery is kind of comical because I didn't believe I had a problem, I didn't think I needed treatment and they did an intervention on me and so I got into treatment for all the wrong reasons. I entered treatment to get everyone off my back and after two weeks of treatment, I had a spiritual awakening. Then, I started to listen; listening is a skill while hearing is biological. So I started to listen and I started to understand a little more about myself. Just a little, but just enough to buy into this idea of recovery. I didn't like the meetings, I used to say "I can get high with people like you" and I'm a Catholic, I call myself a "Recovering Catholic". I didn't want to join a new religion, I had enough of religion, so when they used to say about God, I used to get repulsed, and said, "I don't want to know about God anymore; enough with God". You know us addicts blame everyone and everything, rather than looking at ourselves. I used to blame God of course. One of the oldtimers came up to me one time and said, "John, how about G-O-D?". I said, look I know how to spell and he said, "No John, how about God as Good Orderly Direction?" I said, That I can handle. And that became my higher power for a while.

As time went by, I really wanted to help people. I really wanted to help people the way I was being helped and I was told, don't drink, don't drug, and just go to meetings. I said, but I want to open a treatment center, and I was told, Yeah John, it's OK, just don't drink, don't drug and go to meetings. I used to get really angry about that, but being in recovery I said OK. Within a year and a half I opened my first treatment center. That is going to be part of my story for the lecture so I will just give you a little snippet.

When I entered recovery I got divorced after about a year and ended up living in a hotel room that a friend of mine loaned me to live in. I had no car; I had a bicycle; I had a bottle I used to put my change in when I had change and I had no job. At the time, I was scared and didn't know what direction I was going in.



A: Those are some of the things that happen in early recovery. Then HIV came around and I said, “Oh great. Now I will catch a disease and I’ll die from that!” It was quite a challenging time in my life. However, I had a real passion to open a treatment center so eventually I raised money for it. I will tell my story in more depth in the lecture. I have been in the treatment field for 28 years, designing treatment centers and improving the quality of people’s lives.

When I first got into recovery, I thought it was just about drugs and alcohol, but I learned that it wasn’t—it was learning to live life on life’s terms and that is something I did not do well. In learning about myself and how to improve the quality of my own life, I learned how to reach out and help other people. You know, addicts are selfish and self-centered—it was always all about me and that changed, not entirely, but it did change. Change is a process, not an event and I was getting better and better at that process. I’m still not perfect, if you know someone who is perfect, let me know and I’ll start praying to them.

Recovery is something that I never would have thought it to be the way it was. So I really wanted to help improve the recovery rates of addicts and alcoholics. My son almost died from this, my wife almost died from this, and I almost died from this disease. I made a promise to myself when I watched my son in a hospital bed having charcoal shoved down his throat, that I was going to do something about this. These recovery rates are too low. I designed a treatment center that was called holistic; most people didn’t even know what holistic meant. The public thought give them some vitamins and then they’ll cure you. That is not where it’s at. Holistic means a comprehensive approach, looking at the whole person, not just psychologically, but let’s look at them medically, and all the other contributing factors that may be germane to their addiction and that is what I did. Many people weren’t listening to me because I wasn’t a doctor, I was just a therapist. So, I eventually got together with various scientists, and researchers and today I’m in over 65 medical and scientific journals talking about different modalities and different ways of treating addiction.

Q: Do you feel that since every person is different, there is not one method that suits everyone in regards to recovery?

A: No, recovery is an on-going process and one shoe doesn’t fit all. Everyone has what we call, a different footprint. That is why Dr. Ken Blum, and I call it RDS, Reward Deficiency Syndrome. This is a phrase that Dr. Blum coined and I think it is well done because when you look at addiction, if you look at what the core is, instead of treating the symptoms you treat the core. Look at gambling, sex addiction, exercise addiction, alcohol addiction, drug addiction as if they are balloons with strings. Each balloon is an addiction but what is the core that is driving it? What we looked at is genetics and what we found are people who are genetically predisposed and we looked at what that meant—meaning that they had a lack of dopamine—and a lack of receptor sites to accept the dopamine, and therefore the addicts were looking for something to medicate themselves with. What happens with addiction is that people surround themselves with what supports the addiction, like lack of spirituality, don’t exercise, eat the wrong kinds of food, hang out with the wrong people—this is what happens when you are an addict. When you’re not an addict, you pull that piece out and put the recovery piece in—now you have changed the friends you hang out with, changed the places you go to, you start getting back your spirituality, you exercise properly, and you start eating the right kinds of food. In getting back your spirituality, whatever that means to you, you recognize a higher power outside yourself and you go to a 12-step program. Some people disparage 12-step programs, but I have been in recovery almost 30 years and I still go to meetings and I still give back what was freely given to me. I think it is all important. If you can get clean and sober by going to church, good, by all means, go but for me, I need where people understood what I was going through, where people called me on my stuff, where I wasn’t going to get by just because I was being slippery and manipulative. It is very difficult to get over on a group of addicts. The bottom line is that everyone is different, but basically we are all the same.

Q: What do you say to people who go in for 30-day treatment and when they come out they will go to a couple 12-step meetings, but don’t want to change their friends?

A: I tell them this analogy. Say you work in your garden and you have dirty clothes. You take the dirty clothes off and shower and then you put the dirty clothes back on. What do you think is going to happen? It is that simple.