



Introduction to Recovery International - Self-help for your mental health

By Linda Stanton

Dr. Abraham Low practiced psychiatry in Chicago from the 1920s until his death in 1954. He developed a language and program to assist former hospital patients and others deal with the trivialities of everyday life. His method is based on the science of the operation of the muscles, emotions and nerves. If his patients could learn to control their temper in regards to the small things in life, then they would gain confidence for dealing with the larger issues of life. Put into recovery language: ***stop symptoms at their weakest point.***

He described most problems in this way: His patients developed fears. If the idea of ***danger*** were associated with the fear then the patient often ***worked themselves up*** over it causing hours, days or weeks of distressing symptoms such as: racing thoughts, anxiety, panics, lowered feelings, vicious cycles, etc. He believed if he could teach his patients to spot their fears then they could learn how to reduce their symptoms.

Basically he said that ***fears are beliefs and beliefs can be changed.*** Put another way, ***we can't change an event, but we can change our reaction to it.*** Patients do this by moving their muscles in spite of ill feelings. The method is a cognitive behavioral treatment taught through reading his books, attending meetings where examples are given, as well as practicing the method every day. The website RecoveryInternational.org is a valuable resource to find meetings and tools.

Another way that patients work themselves up is by ***attaching the idea that they were wronged*** in some way and then giving way to their ***angry or fearful temper.*** This is something that most people do from time to time, but it is particularly difficult for the "nervous patient" who may feel ***startled*** by small events. Nervous people often have exceptionally high expectations of life and become disappointed easily.

The idea here is: ***"The absurdity of right and wrong in trivial matters"***. Some examples might be: someone cuts in front of another at the store, or a family member neglects a daily chore like filling the sugar bowl. A person may react by "working themselves up" over it. Some examples of Recovery responses (known as "spots") to these kinds of situations are:

1. The event is in the external environment, but the *internal* environment is most important to maintain mental health
2. People, places and things don't work us up, we work ourselves up
3. People will be rude, crude and indifferent
4. These things will happen in daily life

5. Lower your expectations and your performance will rise
6. Drop the judgment and excuse rather than accuse
7. Make mental health a business, not a game
8. Have the will to bear the discomfort

Another area of interest for Dr. Low was **tension, muscles, and sleeplessness**. A patient may learn to distrust their inner organs after an acute episode or hospitalization brought on by severe symptoms. Then they may tend to avoid the situations that seem to bring on symptoms.

Patients are taught to take control of their muscles by **commanding their muscles to relax**. With practice, a person learns to relax in bed and still obtain adequate sleep or rest instead of tossing and turning all night. **Loss of sleep is distressing but not dangerous**, but a nervous patient may get worked up about it, thus extending the tension and symptoms. It can even become a **vicious cycle**.

The **myth of nervous fatigue** is another concept that Dr. Low taught. A depressed patient may feel they have no energy or may feel very tired after an episode of temper. He taught that one should move their muscles in spite of the feeling of fatigue. Eventually, the person forgets their symptoms and feels better. These and other insights can be found in several helpful books by Dr. Low:

Mental Health through Will-Training

Manage Your Fears, Manage Your Anger

Peace versus Power in the Family: Domestic Discord and Emotional Distress

Thousands of people suffering from depression, anxiety, panic attacks, schizophrenia, and bi-polar disorder have found that the Recovery method and tools enable them to lead better lives. Recovery meetings are run by peer-group leaders who have themselves benefitted from the method and have undergone extensive training. The meetings are structured and follow a consistent format, but will vary according to the people attending and their examples and needs.

Recovery International will celebrate its 80th year in 2017. RI offers more than 400 meetings in the U.S., plus 200 more through its affiliates in Canada, Ireland, and Puerto Rico, plus 22 phone meetings, plus online meetings, chat rooms, and a Facebook meeting page.

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