

[NA meeting at the Glasgow Conference](#)

SMMGP received the following response from a GP who attended the open meeting of Narcotics Anonymous held on the second day of the RCGP conference in Glasgow. Dr Nick Swift writes: *I was recently at the 15th RCGP conference in Glasgow. Whilst there I was privileged enough to be able to attend an open Narcotics Anonymous meeting, I was deeply moved by attending that meeting. It was a sentinel moment in my life and career and I hope it will lead to me referring many more clients to NA. I enclose a brief summary of my experience of that meeting.*

My first experience of an Open Meeting of Narcotics Anonymous

The 15th National RCGP conference in substance misuse has just come and gone, at the SECC in Glasgow. And very good it was too. On the first day in the morning, one of the speakers, Dr David McCartney, Clinical Lead for LEAP, NHS Lothian, gave an inspiring talk on 'The Place of Mutual Aid in Recovery'. He discussed the success of the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship in the sustained recovery of many substance users, and highlighted the importance of these important meetings to the audience.

Following on from this talk, the obvious interest in the NA meetings led the RCGP committee to stage an impromptu Open NA Meeting in the Dochart Room of the SECC, the following day at One O'clock. The meeting was hosted by Simon, 'an addict' and 5 of his 'Fellows' who very kindly attended the meeting, as well as 30 or so 'professionals' (as Simon referred to us).

The meeting, the first that I, (a Clinical Assistant in Substance Misuse on the Wirral for 8 years now), to my shame, had ever attended. The Meeting opened and a reprint of the 'White Booklet' was read out by various members of the fellowship and the meeting began with Stef 'an addict', a local man who spoke for 10 minutes about himself, his history of addiction, his attempts to try and give up the polysubstance misuse he had been entrapped with for nearly 30 years of his life. The most incredible words he spoke were at the end of his monologue, and they were "I walked into my first meeting powerless and hopeless, and walked out with power and hope". He stopped using heroin on that very day and has maintained total abstinence from it since that day (he continued on a methadone script for some time). He admitted to being totally lost in drugs, but he now reaches out to those who are lost and helps them into recovery, through NA meetings and the work he does as a worker in the drugs field. He was not alone in his story of recovery.

All of the Fellows spoke in turn all of them had amazing stories to tell about their lives as drug users and the endless miseries they experienced through their dependencies. All spoke about how the NA helped, often in the very early stages of their attendances, and helped them to turn their long histories of drug and alcohol use around. One of the Fellows was a GP who had major problems with opiates through his medical career but had been in recovery through his involvement with NA for 1 year. He received a celebratory anniversary 'key ring' from Simon with a round of applause from all at the meeting.

The meeting closed after Simon had given his history, also admitting to total helplessness in the face of his addictions, but having attended meetings and seen that drug users had 'stopped using completely', was able to do this himself. He kindly thanked us all for attending, as did his Fellows and one gentleman thanked us for being involved in the care of substance misuse and providing them and those like them the opportunity through engagement and treatment to stay alive long enough to be able to earn their recovery through the help of NA.

I and some of my 'professionals' were really humbled by this. I personally felt it a great honour and privilege to have witnessed this meeting, with the openness, honesty and humility of these men who were prepared to speak so frankly about their inner lives in the presence of strangers.

Of course, the question of the apparent 'religiosity' of the Fellowship was discussed at the end with a few of us who stayed behind. The mention of God in the 12 steps is often cited by many of those we try to help with regard to AA, NA and the like, as being "not for them." Simon was very clear in his answers that NA is a spiritual fellowship with no adherence to any particular god, but as it says in the literature, "we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as *we understand him*". I think we all understood what he meant.

In summary: amazing and powerful in many ways. As a result of attending, I will try to attend some of our local open meetings to make myself known and will certainly direct many more users who find themselves 'powerless and hopeless and helpless' in the face of their addictions.

Thank you to all the Fellows at the meeting. You have really affected me, in a deep and positive way.

Dr Nick Swift, Clinical Assistant Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust.