

Get Healthier By Giving Away Your Medicine

Who ever heard of getting healthier by giving someone else your medicine? No, I'm not talking about illegally giving away your prescription medication or failing to follow doctor's orders. I'm actually talking about the therapeutic value of giving away your time, talent, and treasures.

As a part of therapy I regularly encourage clients to find a way to help others. In helping others they actually help themselves to heal. Serving others often gives them a sense of purpose. Sometimes it helps them to re-frame their own problems. Sometimes they realize that they are actually still very fortunate in spite of their current situation. On some occasions it gives a sense of hope. At other times caring for others works like La-maze for a mother about to give birth. It helps people to focus elsewhere instead of on their own pain.

In many cases clients often get stuck in their pain. Sometimes a loss holds them hostage for years. Their entire identity has been locked up in their disorder, former job title, or family status. There is no motivation to do any more than merely survive-if that. Assisting others can sometimes help clients to once again find purpose for living and letting healing begin.

Sometimes volunteering is part of the cure for those suffering the devastation of unemployment.

It helps to minimize depression by preventing isolation and the feeling of worthlessness and hopelessness. It also offers excellent networking opportunities and resume enhancement.

Blessing others can help to fill time. This is especially true for those in recovery from addiction. Addicts must find ways to fill the time which was once filled by their addiction.

Volunteering also helps them to gain an identity apart from their disease.

Sometimes clients feel that they have nothing to give to anyone else. Mistakenly they use the excuse that they don't have a degree, special skills, or lots of extra cash. Many times just giving a little at the right time can make an enormous difference in someones life. Sometimes just our mere presence shows that we care.

Although the concept of giving away our medicine sounds strange, it actually involves a chemical within the brain. Researchers call it a helper's high • since there is an endorphin rush. Research is suggesting that Good Samaritans" are happier, healthier, and live longer. Some reports indicate that it boosts the immune system, decreases depression, speeds recovery from surgery and decreases restless nights.

Research shows that even those helping another to recover in a support group reap benefits themselves. Conversely I've found that fear sometimes hinders some clients' ability to heal in a group. Without someone to hold their hands many would never otherwise walk into a room of strangers. I frequently pair support group members with potential newcomers prior to meetings so that early trust can be established and clients can gain courage to attend. Healing takes place which would be impossible without this intervention.

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Since many people are very lonely I often use the "friendship intervention." Their illnesses and life circumstances have isolated them and compounded their challenges. Isolation becomes its own torture. At times they are alone in a room full of people and at other times they are totally alone or the only adult in the home. Sometimes those hurting need a shoulder to cry on or someone with which to share their true feelings. At times they need transportation or other services. Together healing benefits are multiplied. I cannot tell you the number of times which my clients have told me that they have gotten more than they gave from the giving experience.

The possibilities for volunteering/sharing formally or informally are endless. It is just a matter of "Turning Needs into Deeds" as the Guidepost book is titled. Maybe it is time to consider giving your medicine away.