

An identity transformation from someone capable only of receiving help to someone who helps others could be key to the impact of **12-step self-help groups**. The latest indication that helping may be therapeutic comes from **a reanalysis** of the Project MATCH alcohol treatment trial. **1** During the three months of treatment, 8% of the sample said they had helped other alcoholics through one-on-one support ('sponsorship') or by promulgating 12-step principles. Over the following year, 40% of these patients avoided drinking compared to just 22% of the remainder. This finding remained significant even when the number of meetings attended was taken in to account.

Sponsorship is one prominent manifestation of active participation, but this also embraces simple acts like making the coffee at meetings or sharing one's experiences in the group. In a **second study** derived from a national US cocaine treatment trial, such activities were strongly related to later reductions in cocaine use and problems, while simply attending meetings was not. **2**

The studies echo earlier work with similar implications, but the possibility remains that participation is a *reflection* of therapeutic progress rather than a cause. However, both featured studies trialed treatments which successfully encouraged 12-step involvement, lending credibility to the theory that this was indeed an active ingredient which could augment outcomes if appropriately encouraged.

1 Pagano M.E. *et al.* "Helping other alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous and drinking outcomes: findings from Project MATCH." *J. Studies on Alcohol*: 2004, 65(6), p. 766–773 **AC**

LINKS *Self help. Don't leave it to the patients*, issue 13

2 Weiss R.D. *et al.* "The effect of 12-step self-help group attendance and participation on drug use outcomes among cocaine-dependent patients." *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*: 2005, 77(2), p. 177–1784 **DS**