

## OFFCUTS

New studies suggest that the image of addiction as a 'chronic relapsing condition' is due to seeing it through the narrow slit of treatment populations. With a broader vision it seems that what is chronic is the lack of the physical, psychological and most of all social resources needed to lever oneself out of a bad patch, collectively termed **recovery capital**.<sup>1,2</sup> Some of this capital is lacking due to pre-addiction environment and upbringing or is lacking in the addict's current environment. Some is lost during addiction as the support of friends and families and employability are eroded and doors close behind the addict due to criminalisation and social stigma, blocking a return to normality. In societies where use of a particular drug is heavily stigmatised its regular users will nearly all be socially alienated and need to turn to treatment for help, giving the impression of a chronic condition which requires professional intervention. In the same societies, where use of a different drug (such as alcohol in Western societies) is more acceptable, most over-heavy users will still retain social links and be able to recover without formal help<sup>3</sup> by drawing on their recovery capital,<sup>4</sup> usually at the first try.<sup>5</sup> Addicts of the kind who resort to treatment services typically lack recovery capital and repeatedly relapse. This vision suggests that if treatment is to have a lasting impact it must (re)create this capital by providing supportive social relationships (eg, with treatment staff or through mutual aid groups) and improving the life chances of the client.

**1** Cloud W. *et al.* "Natural recovery from substance dependency: lessons for treatment providers." *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*: 2001, 1(1), p. 83–104.

**2** Klingemann H. *et al.* *Promoting self change from problem substance use. Practical implications for policy, prevention and treatment.* Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

**3** Hasin D. *et al.* "DSM-IV Alcohol dependence and sustained reduction in drinking: investigation in a community sample." *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*: 2001, 62, p. 509–517.

**4** Blomqvist J. "Recovery with and without treatment: a comparison of resolutions of alcohol and drug problems." *Addiction Research & Theory*: 2002, 10(2), p. 119–158.

**5** Price R.K. *et al.* "Remission from drug abuse over a 25-year period: patterns of remission and treatment use." *American Journal of Public Health*: 2001, 91(7), p. 1107–1113.