What is Recovery?

Can We Measure It?

A. Thomas McLellan
Why define recovery?

Those “in recovery” don’t need a definition...

But the rest of us do!
Why Define Recovery?

- Many think it’s “trying to become sober”
- Not unanimity among those “in recovery”
- Synonymous with AA??
  - Many feel excluded – e.g. those taking Methadone
- Could be important outside of addiction
  - Wellness, QoL important in all chronic illnesses
What we did

• Betty Ford Institute – Consensus Conference

• Commissioned research papers
  – 12-Step research, interviews with those in recovery, measurement methods

• Invited clinicians, policy makers, family members, recovery advocates
  – Most were “in recovery”

• Debated key concepts
Guiding Premises

- A state, not a method
- More than sobriety
- Focus is addiction
- This is just a starting point!
Recovery is...

“A voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health and citizenship”
Specific Elements

• **Voluntary** –
  • not possible in a controlled environment or through coercion

• **Maintained State** -
  • Not a permanent state
  • Requires active maintenance
**Sobriety**

*Cardinal feature* - abstinence from alcohol and non-prescribed drugs

*Early sobriety* = 1 - 11 months

*Sustained sobriety* = 1 - 5 years

*Stable sobriety* = 5 years or more
• **Medication Assisted Sobriety** –
  • Prescribed meds, taken as directed,

• **Question** -
  • Is medication assisted sobriety as stable as sobriety without medications?
Sobriety Continued

- **Tobacco** –
  - Definition is silent re: tobacco

- **Rationale** -
  - Not justifiable from PH perspective
  - Sober smokers now think of themselves as being in recovery
Personal Health and Citizenship

• Rationale –
  WHO definition of **health**: 
  “...a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease”

• Most attractive, desirable elements
• Question – Relationship to sobriety?
Personal Health

Improved quality of personal life

Measure: WHO Quality of Life scales

- physical health,
- psychological health,
- independence,
- spirituality
Citizenship

living with regard and respect for those around you

Measure: WHO Quality of Life scale

- social function, and
- environment
CONCLUSIONS

- *Recovery* ... one-word summary of all positive outcomes
- *Many Paths* to Recovery
- “Cancer Survivor” is empirical term – How about “Stable Recovery”
- What are implications for:
  - Research?  Treatment?  Other Illnesses?