

## **Vietnam: The Gift of Recovery, 2013**

Sharing our experience, strength and hope for recovery

By

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### **Introduction**

Vietnam for most Americans remains an enigma. Millions visit The Wall in Washington, placing remembrances for fallen soldiers. The American War (as the Vietnamese refer to it) was a time of conflict in America. Few were neutral; either you were for the war, some were drafted or volunteered to serve. Others opted out of the war and stood in protest to it. Regardless of where one stood on the war, it was a time of great division and remains so to today. We did not treat our returning veterans from Vietnam well. Many veterans are still in treatment at the V.A. for various illnesses resulting from the war. The shadow of the American war still haunts our international relations, forty years later.

In the past ten years, the United States government has made a major commitment to address the HIV/AIDS and drug abuse issues of Vietnam. An Addiction Technology Transfer Center (under UCLA ATTC) was established recently at Hanoi Medical University. The Presidents Emergency Preparedness Fund on AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), USAID and the Center for Disease Control have offered considerable assistance to Vietnam in operating sixty methadone maintenance clinics throughout the country. However, the concept of recovery is new in the country.

Because of the significance of the war for many Americans, especially to war veterans, and because of the invest of time and resources made by the U.S. government in Vietnam, the concept of a Gift of Recovery was envisioned in 2010 by Dr. David J. Powell.. Although David did not serve in the military, Vietnam remained a troubling place for him for decades. From 1976-1999, Dr. Powell oversaw the Clinical Preceptorship Program for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps at over 100 U.S. military bases worldwide. This gave David a profound appreciation for the military and its committed personnel. Dr. Powell has been training in Vietnam on clinical skills, clinical supervision and family counseling since 2005. Annually, he conducts training for managers and supervision of supervisors for Family Health International (FHI) in Vietnam. This training is in addition to the excellent

training provided by Dr. Robert Ali, Adelaide, Australia, Dr. Rick Rawson and other faculty members of UCLA.

### **People can recover from addiction**

We believe people can recover from substance abuse. Men and women throughout the world have experienced the joys of recovery, often by sharing their experience, strength and hope for health and recovery.

The Gift of Recovery visit was envisioned as an opportunity for retired military personnel, who had experienced their own recovery from substance abuse and went on to distinguished careers in the addictions field, to share with Vietnam their experiences of recovery. The Gift of Recovery was a chance to show that recovery does happen in addictions.

The Gift of Recovery sought to bring this message Vietnam, to patients and their families in recovery, to counselors, health care professionals, and representatives of the military. It was not intended as a healing process for our faculty who participated, although it certainly was that. By calling it “The Gift,” it was freely given with no expectations of a response. The goals were consistent with the 12<sup>th</sup> Step of Alcoholics Anonymous—“having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics (*and those addicted to drugs*), and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

### **Goals and Objectives**

The goals and objectives of the Gift of Recovery visit were as follows:

1. For faculty to present to health care professionals, medical personnel, and patients in treatment in Vietnam on core issues in addiction, such as the neurobiology of addiction, counseling skills, 12 Step principles, family intervention approaches, etc.
  - a. To give lectures and presentations to representatives at medical universities, methadone maintenance clinics, and other facilities
  - b. To share their life stories of recovery

2. For faculty to demonstrate the value of recovery support programs and possible range of services.
  - a. To conduct demonstration 12 step meetings for substance abusers and for family members
  - b. To share their stories, experience, strength and hope of recovery to patients and family members
  - c. To provide counseling, as appropriate, for patients and their families in recovery
3. For faculty to train medical personnel in the Vietnamese military on appropriate methods for the prevention, intervention, and treatment of substance abusers in the military.
  - a. To provide presentations to Vietnamese military personnel
  - b. To provide technical assistance in the development and delivery of services to members of the military who may experience substance abuse-related concerns.

### **Faculty**

The faculty for the Gift of Recovery consisted of four men, three of whom were veterans of the war.

Dr. David Powell is President of the International Center for Health Concerns, Inc., and the Clinical Supervision Institute and has trained for the past 36 years on clinical supervision and other topics in 50 states and 87 countries. He is also Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine and Senior Advisor, Yale Behavioral Health Program, Department of Psychiatry.

Mr. Edward Lacy, MA is the Executive Director of the Dunes in East Hampton, California, and has been Executive Director of Beacon House, Lasting Recovery, the Transitional Living Corporation of Arizona, Rosewood Center for Addiction, among others. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1969-1990, as lead trainer for the U.S. Navy Drug and Alcohol Counseling Institute in San Diego, California. Ed served in Vietnam as a Marine in the early 1970s.

Dr. Thomas Glancy is a career Officer in the U.S. Navy, serving in Korea and Vietnam. He holds a doctoral degree in Oceanography and served as a trainer for the U.S. Atlantic Fleet Anti-Submarine Warfare Tactical School in Norfolk, Virginia. He had a distinguished naval career as commander of a destroyer squadron in the Pacific Ocean. Dr. Glancy served as the commanding officer of the U.S. Naval Alcohol Rehabilitation Center in Norfolk, Virginia until his retirement from the Navy in 1982. He served in Vietnam in the mid-1960s.

Dr. Allen Berger is an internationally recognized expert in addiction. He is best known for his work on integrating therapy with the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and for his insights into emotional sobriety. He is recognized for his outstanding teaching abilities, his insightful practice of therapy, and as an effective clinician and trainer. He has been on CNN and has authored journal articles and three books, including a Hazelden best selling *12 Stupid things that mess up recovery* (2008). Dr. Berger served in Vietnam as a Marine in the early 1970s.

### **Results of the Gift of Recovery**

We recognize that addiction treatment is still in its infancy in Vietnam. We applaud the efforts and concern for those suffering from addiction. In Vietnam, while the term “addiction” is used to describe those with a problem with opiates, addiction in Vietnam also entails significant issues related to other substances of abuse, especially alcohol. Alcoholism is at least as serious an issue for the Vietnamese as heroin. Many other drugs including marijuana and amphetamines are also being abused, and need to be considered an addiction problem as well.

Drug replacement therapy has significant harm reduction value. And for this reason alone it is of great value to the Vietnamese. The role of drug replacement therapy in recovery is to support a transition between active addiction and recovery. Placing a client on Methadone can bring stability to client’s life that has been chaotic. It can get them back on track and create an

opportunity to establish a foundation for recovery. Using drug replacement therapy in this way can be very helpful and supportive of recovery.

The involvement of families into treatment is a new and exciting step in Vietnam. While in country, the Gift of Recovery faculty had several opportunities to meet with family members of those in treatment. There is a yearning among families to find recovery for the patient and for themselves. Group counseling is still in its infancy as well, as staff of the methadone maintenance clinics have far more clients than they are able to see—caseloads of 100-200 patients. Group counseling is clearly the next step for these programs.

The concept of recovery is new and relapse is often seen (as it has been for decades in America) as a treatment failure. The faculty was able to share a broader vision of recovery and to instill hope in patients and staff that they can recover.

As many of the patients are HIV positive, have TB or other infectious diseases, counselors are often concerned about their health risks when dealing with contagious clients. Through education and training, staff will be better equipped to deal with such issues.

## **Conclusion**

Many lives were touched as a result of the Gift of Recovery visit. Such a model has great promise both for veterans who wish to share their experience, strength and hope for recovery and for the Vietnamese people. We hope others will find this an exciting concept and write to us to express their interest. We hope other American veterans of the Vietnam War with stable recovery and experience in the addictions field as professionals will step forward and offer their experience, strength and hope to their colleagues and friends in Vietnam. For additional information, contact David J. Powell, Ph.D., [djpowell2@yahoo.com](mailto:djpowell2@yahoo.com).