



A SUTTER HEALTH AFFILIATE

April 5, 2000

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing this letter to describe the invaluable work that Mr. Martin Nicolaus has done at Alta Bates Medical Center on 4 North Herrick, the Dual Diagnosis Unit. As a dual diagnosis crisis intervention facility, our patient population consists largely of persons who are suffering from psychiatric and mental health problems combined with a variety of substance abuse disorders. The majority of our patients arrive here against their will, having been placed on an involuntary psychiatric hold for observation and treatment because their psychiatric condition has caused them to be dangerous to themselves, or others, or gravely disabled and unable to care for themselves.

Since late 1998, Mr. Nicolaus has volunteered to lead a one hour weekly meeting of Life Ring Secular Recovery (formerly SOS) with our patients. Mr. Nicolaus brings to this group his personal life experience as an alcoholic in recovery. Much like the members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, he shares his own story of recovery, modeling a message of strength, hope and recovery for our despairing patients. As a volunteer, and a non-professional, Mr. Nicolaus also brings a model of self-help through community support to our patients.

The LifeRing group approach encourages patients to look within themselves and to each other for the strength to achieve abstinence and a healthier life style. Unlike the more traditional Alcoholics Anonymous approach, Life Ring does not use the concept "Higher Power" or the "12 Steps of Alcoholic's Anonymous." The philosophy and methods of LifeRing were developed as an alternative to AA for those people who need tools for recovery but have personal difficulty embracing the concept of "Higher Power." We have found that this approach encourages patients to begin to think positively about themselves and to find a reason to live productively. This approach resonates with the significant portion of our patients on 4 North who have received little or no benefit from past 12-Step involvement.

Although the Life Ring group's philosophy is different from the 12-Step model, we have not experienced any friction or strife as a result of adding the LifeRing meeting. We also offer AA to our patients. Our treatment team believes that there are many viable paths to recovery, LifeRing being one very positive adjunct to our traditional offerings. The LifeRing meeting is a bright spot in the patients' week, and staff find that participation in the meeting enhances patients' motivation to get well.

Based on our experiences at this facility over the past two years, on behalf of the treatment team on 4 North, we would recommend similar LifeRing meetings to other facilities interested in expanding the range of their patient services.

Sincerely Yours,

Jane Haggstrom, R.N., Ph.D.  
Patient Care Manager  
4 North Herrick  
Telephone: 510-204-4339

Alta Bates Medical Center  
Herrick Campus, 2001 Dwight Way, Berkeley, CA 94704  
Tel 510.204.4444