

## **For the Healthcare or Mental Health Professional:**

Overeaters Anonymous (OA) is a self-help, nonprofit organization patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous that offers a three-fold recovery program from the disease of compulsive eating: physical, emotional and spiritual. The OA program is an anonymous fellowship open to any person with an eating disorder or weight problem; there are no dues or fees. OA is open to compulsive eaters of different types: people with compulsive overeating, anorexia, bulimia and combinations of these. We come in all different sizes and shapes. Some of us come to OA from other recovery programs, and for others, OA is our first Twelve-Step fellowship.

In OA we realize that compulsive eating is an addiction. Jill H. writes “The *New Zealand Medical Journal* of the New Zealand Medical Association recently published a thematic analysis of the attendance of 72 [medical] students at OA meetings over a period of six years. Initially, most students chose to attend OA meetings...because the students doubted food could be an addictive substance the way drugs are...They learned of the harm caused by addictive eating, including uncontrollable bingeing, starving, swearing off and starting over again; suicidal inclinations; social and physical isolation and broken relationships and lives. They likened this harm to that from other addictions. They felt many people see food addiction as a convenient excuse for excess eating, and clinicians rarely consider addiction as part of the development of compulsive-eating problems.” (Professional Community Courier, 2011) ( To read the full medical article go to <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/123-1311/4033/> .)

We eat to numb our feelings, similar to other addicts. However, unlike other addicts, we cannot stop eating completely. We need food in order to live! We may likely have a lot of shame and guilt around our eating disorder.

Why should you refer a patient or client to OA? Vivian Eskin, PhD writes “Overeaters Anonymous is a powerful component of treatment for the compulsive overeater...Adding the Twelve-Step component helps people break out of isolation, shame, guilt, loneliness and the perception they are the only ones with such a problem...By going to OA meetings, getting a sponsor and working the recovery program, one learns about his or her relationship to food. That powerful awareness facilitates change.” (Professional Community Courier, 2011)

In OA we share our own experience, strength and hope. OA does not compete with the professional community. In contrast, we claim no medical, nutritional or psychological expertise. We suggest that interested members contact qualified professionals for help in these areas. We hope that this glimpse into Oa will help you to refer your patients to us. If you would like more information about OA, visit the rest of our website or see <http://www.oa.org>.