

How do "graduation" ceremonies effect addiction treatment?

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As 64 percent of Americans entering addiction treatment are repeat patients, many health care professionals have questioned the significance of addiction graduation ceremonies. In a new article published in *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, addiction clinician and researcher Izaak L. Williams explores this disconnect and its origins in the treatment context.

The [graduation](#) ceremony is seemingly above criticism in its "appeal to tradition and appeal to emotion," says Williams. He calls for a reevaluation due to "the lack of evidence of a positive impact and potential for iatrogenic affects coupled with the shifting landscape of the treatment industry."

The terms "graduation" and "commencement" are problematic. Each suggests of an ending, but addiction is a biopsychosocial condition too complex to be cured in a single course of treatment. As complexity arises from its highly personal nature, imposing a graduation ceremony on the process incentivizes a superficial going-through-the-motions approach over the commitment to strong individual growth essential to long term results. This structure also shifts the practitioners' focus from patient-centric [treatment](#) to a program's overall graduation rate. This counterproductive shift is reinforced by potential sources of funding and insurance providers in their push towards a standardized process that obscures the addiction-as-disease model. Given this apparent failure of the status quo,

Williams suggests a re-branding of graduation as a "life in recovery transition day," built around a commitment to a long term recovery plan, and reinforced by the recovering person's support network.

More information: Izaak L. Williams, "Drug Treatment Graduation Ceremonies: It's Time to Put This Long-Cherished Tradition to Rest," *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, Volume 32, Issue 4, 2014, [DOI: 10.1080/07347324.2014.952995](https://doi.org/10.1080/07347324.2014.952995)

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