

"12 Steps" toward healthier attitudes and coping strategies

Steps 10 & 11:

*we continue to monitor internal feelings and needs;
we remain open and responsive to help from others*

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By now, we have made noticeable progress in our efforts to restore balance to our natural human emotions and instinctual needs. We are more self-aware — and less self-absorbed. Problems that have evolved from our personality style, modified and amplified by the influence of our medical professional reality, have been identified and much relieved. Elements

of congruency are seeping into our lives: we are appearing and behaving in a manner that accurately represents how we really are. We no longer have to pretend.

Now we are challenged to sustain, and build upon these hard-won gains. Resting on the laurels of our step-work is a mistake. In the absence of progress, backsliding is to be expected. It has not been our tradition to attune ourselves to the signals our emotions and basic drives send us, but we are making progress in this vital area. Some form of daily "affect-hygiene" is required if we are to capitalize on the marvelous homeostatic information our internal feeling state provides us. How is this to be achieved?

A regular practice of objective introspection is indicated...a pause to reflect upon how we are feeling. A convenient time for many is the beginning or end of the day — or both. Meditative reflection in the morning helps to set the tone for the day, aligning our feeling state with our intentions and purpose for the

day. In the evening, we may use the opportunity to consider the day as it comes to a close, "scanning" for positive and negative inner reactions to our choices, words, deeds and interactions with others. We must be especially vigilant regarding the return of old problems that have plagued us. Has resentment crept back into our lives? Have our priorities shifted, leaving us too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Has an inflated sense of ourselves crowded out our healthy humility? Is there anything we have said or done that has been hurtful to others? Do we owe an apology or any other form of correction? Repetition of this regular practice of self-examination becomes a healthy habit.

There may be other opportunities during the day, when our emotions and reactions to events are fresh, to stop and consider them. We live in the moment, monitor our feelings, and choose actions and responses to them that are helpful, rather than hurtful, to others and ourselves.

The practice of this step is like a

personal inventory of the present. Accepting that no one is perfect, we freely identify our mistakes as they are made. But we also list the things that have gone well, and our good feelings that accompany those events. These, too, are worth remembering and repeating. We have achieved a level of self-knowledge beyond anything from our past. We finally realize that our attitudes and actions influence everything around us in a manner of our choosing. We are now free to influence our reality in a positive way, no longer suffering as self-perceived unwitting victims of circumstance.

Step 11

In this step, we continue the practice of maintaining our healthy psychological, social and spiritual condition begun in Step Ten. Having admitted our problems as they occur, we accept and correct them as well. Personal effort alone may suffice, but often we will need help from others.

Perhaps the most significant

achievement in our journey through these steps so far has been the relief from egocentric isolation. We have cracked the tough shell of entitlement, reinforced by the medical profession, that surrounded us. Our humanity, like the seed within exposed to water and sunlight, has begun to flourish under the influence of loving support from others. Our challenge is to maintain and develop this practice, shunning the enticement of secrecy, pride and personality-stifling professionalism.

We have found that a regular practice of honest communication is the key. Admission of our problems to ourselves, difficult as that is, may not be sufficient. Earlier, we discovered the value of sharing our concerns with others as we emerged from a state of distress and isolation. The same remains true if we are to maintain our day-to-day sense of balance and well-being. Sharing our problems with trusted others — close friends, spouse and family, professional helpers and, of course, a Higher Power as we understand one — is as necessary now, and every day, as ever. How is this done? The answer is simple: we talk to others regularly. There are many ways and places to do this, including journal clubs, recreational facilities, our therapist's office, our friends' living rooms, our Internet discussion groups, over coffee in quiet moments with our spouses, and so on.

And then we listen. Keeping our minds open, we have learned to pay attention to the opinions of others offered from a caring perspective. We sift through the experience and advice shared with us, take that which is useful and make helpful changes. Trust in others, and the process of sharing, comes much more easily than it used to. The process works in reverse, of course, as our experience is freely offered in return. Our web of connections grows and sustains us. Maintaining currency with others who love and care about us is vital, even though for most of us, this wasn't a common practice in the past; today it is.

For those who value a relationship with a Higher Power, prayer and meditation are usually described as useful means of communication. Simply put, prayer is talking to the God of our understanding, and meditation is listening. In prayer, we seek discernment: knowledge of the preferred path for us. Through meditation, our awareness of spiritual direction is enhanced. This is the quiet time to listen and reflect on the guidance we have received. Our purpose is to improve our conscious contact with the God of our understanding, however we choose to do so. In this manner, many of us find peace, strength and heightened intuitive abilities from a previously unimagined source. Deliberate, fo-

cused communication with a Higher Power was something many of us never truly understood in the past; now we do.

Practising this step on a daily basis yields the most miraculous reward: a deep sense of belonging. Not to the medical profession, but to humanity. Fear, resentment and isolation have been replaced with serenity, acceptance of ourselves and others, and a genuine sense of purpose. We are ready, now, to freely share our experience with others. OMR

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OMA Physician Health Program 12 Steps for Medical Professionals:

Suggested Guidelines for Physicians Who Seek Rehumanizing

1. We admitted difficulty living as a medical professional only, that problems arise from this single focus in life.
2. We came to believe that accepting help and support from everything life has to offer could restore our physical, mental, social and spiritual health.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our fellows who have learned these lessons and a Higher Power as we understand one.
4. We made a searching and fearless personal inventory of our problems, strengths, goals and dreams.
5. We shared our list with trusted others, acknowledging our character weaknesses, virtues and humanity.
6. We were entirely ready to accept the help available to address our basic human needs.
7. With humility and an open mind we sought to correct the shortcomings in our lives.
8. We made a list of all persons and institutions we resented and became willing to address these issues.
9. We made direct amends where necessary and took any action required to relieve these tensions, except when doing so would harm others.
10. We continued to monitor internal feelings and needs, promptly admitting when we had a problem.
11. We remained open and responsive to help, guidance and love we can receive from others who care about us.
12. Having achieved personal revitalization as a result of these steps, we try to carry this message to the others in our lives, and to practise these principles in all our affairs.