

"12 Steps" toward healthier attitudes and coping strategies

## Steps 8 & 9:

*making a list of all persons and institutions we resent; making direct amends where necessary*

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**W**ith our arrival at Step Eight, we turn our attention from our personal character traits and problems, to an examination of our relationships with others. If we have been thorough to this point, our Step Four list has already revealed much about our resentments, and subsequent work has illuminated our personal role in each of them.

It is necessary, as well, to understand how our resentments and our behaviour arising from them may affect others, and our ability to relate to them in a positive way.

Why have we placed so much emphasis on resentment? The answer is simple: to harbour resentment is a futile and self-damaging proposition, like swallowing a deadly potion and expecting someone else to die. Resentment is poisonous to our body, mind and spirit. The dictionary defines resentment as anger or ill will in view of real or fancied insult or injury. But embodied in the word itself is the real malignancy: the re-feeling of hurt and bitterness over and over, the pain becoming greater in experience and impact as time goes on. When we resent, we suffer the most. Our fellows may be hurt as well, but chances are they aren't nearly as aware of our malice as we'd like them to be.

Once again, we consider colleagues who have upset us. Perhaps they no longer send patients to us like they once did, or we have the impression

that they discourage patients from seeking our services. They challenge our leadership, threaten our reputation, impugn our abilities, fail to support us, or interfere with us in any number of ways.

These have been our beliefs, and of them are born our feelings of resentment toward these people. All of this has been listed in Step Four, and at this point we add any other resentments and individuals we may have harmed as a result of our resentments, that were forgotten or overlooked.

By now we have come a long way in our process of self-examination. We understand our sensitivities and personality problems revealed by these issues, and we are well on our way to resolving them. We have forgiven ourselves for these things. This being true, we must acknowledge that, in some cases, we have done harm to others, whether or not they have actually harmed us. The time has come to apply forgiveness to our interactions with them, as well.

Now we are challenged with humility beyond anything we have imagined so far. If we really want freedom from tension and isolation, we must be prepared to approach others we have resented and harmed in order to make amends and resolve the conflict we have had with them. We become completely prepared to do so from the perspective of our own attitudes and behaviour.

There is no place in this process for judgment of others. We do not languish in the victim role, delaying acceptance and responsibility for our part in the matter.

In order to be thorough, we consider all other people and institutions in our life. This includes family, friends, the hospitals, clinics and universities where we work, and so on. Examining any tensions we find there, we become entirely ready to resolve them and relegate them to the past.

We become completely willing to make amends wherever our behaviour has hurt anyone else. The same

is true if it has been our lack of action that has caused a problem for someone. And if we have been the recipients of wrongdoing, we become prepared to forgive them. It may be just as damaging to us to harbour justifiable outrage as pure resentment. It is essential that the corrosion of our spirit attributed to these lingering problems cease and be reversed.

Before completing this step, we verify that we have listed every individual and institution somehow affected by our resentment or negative attitudes and behaviour.

This step links to Step Nine, the actual making of amends, but is separate from it. Our preparations are made as though we may never actually take that step, so that we can summon our willingness to do so without fear or hesitation. There are benefits for us in this process alone. We are learning how to apply the new attitudes we have about ourselves to the way we deal with others.

The need to avoid people no longer intrudes upon us, and our isolation is further relieved. And it is likely that our actions are no longer making others miserable.

Completion of this step allows us the freedom to begin making amends in Step Nine.

### Step Nine

Now prepared to work on our relationships with others, there are several important questions to consider. Who should we approach right away, and when should amends be delayed?

Care should be taken to distinguish between procrastination and good judgment when timing is considered. Are there instances when it's better to withhold making amends? How should we proceed?

One approach is to begin by reviewing the list of individuals we have made in the previous step. Some of these people we see regu-

larly, and an opportunity to offer an apology or a correction for any slight or offence we have committed will present itself if we are patient.

When the right moment arrives, we gather our courage and humility and offer our sincere apology. Gracious acceptance is likely, but not necessary. We offer these amends to set things right from our perspective.

In other cases, we owe amends to individuals we seldom see. Some planning is required in these situations. When we are ready, a visit, phone call, or perhaps a well-considered letter are all means that we may use to offer our amends.

If our amends are owed to a group of people, such as our patients, offering the best of ourselves and our abilities to them will make up for having ever done less than that in the past.

Sometimes, amends are not possible or practical. If it's not possible to contact someone, then the willingness to do so will suffice.

Contact with others still suffering from our actions may not always be a good idea. Our approach may not be welcome, or may further inflame a situation. In such instances, our patient willingness to resolve the conflict at a future, more appropriate time, is in order.

When we are not sure about approaching another person, discussing our concerns with a trusted friend or colleague might help. It is not acceptable to relieve our own guilt by troubling someone else with our unwelcome approach.

Remembering the institutions on our list, we make amends here, too. These may be financial or legal, and, if necessary, seeking help from the appropriate professional may be indicated. The goal in every instance is to be relieved from the burden of guilt, bitterness or remorse we might be carrying, and to restore healthy relationships. We can now move freely in the world, no longer afraid of whom we might encounter, no longer generating antagonism that alienates our fellows.

Patience, courage and faith are all necessary in working this step, like the ones preceding it. It takes time to put our house in order. But the result of this effort is the end of our isolation and the release of our spirit. We will again know intimacy in our lives. We will have learned how to form healthy boundaries between ourselves and our profession. Giving becomes genuine and no longer self-depleting. Our priorities are rearranging as our lives become better balanced. Our attitudes about life have changed. Bitterness and unhappiness have been replaced by serenity and joy. We are closer to our true selves, our friends and family, our patients and colleagues, and to the God of our understanding than ever before.

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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.