

"12 Steps" toward healthier attitudes and coping strategies

Step 12:

we carry our message of personal revitalization to others in our lives, and practise these principles in all our affairs

by Michael Kaufmann, MD
OMA Physician Health Program



We began our work on these steps feeling isolated and distressed; we arrive at Step Twelve revitalized. Mired in misery and focused mainly on one thing in life — our medical careers — we were cut off from the glories of everything life has to offer. We accepted our broken condition and, consequently, became free to experience all of the joy and fulfillment of living: the healing paradox. Literally, we have come “back to life.”

Medicine has become but one thread that describes our human complexity. Our family lives, personal interests, social relationships and spiritual practices have been revealed and interwoven with our career — a rich tapestry, textured, colourful, and different for each of us.

There is no single component outstripping another, perilously out of balance. Physical vitality and medical practice are no longer mutually exclusive conditions. Embracing the emotions that the experiences of our lives generate, we have grown as individuals and have become more empathetic toward our patients and others.

We were surprised to notice how pleasant those around us became until we realized how wonderfully others reacted to the changes in us. Now it's so easy for us to gravitate toward one another. We enjoy intimacy with those closest to us unlike anything we experienced before. And many of us know the peace that comes from the faith we have in a

Higher Power in our lives.

This didn't happen just by reading about these steps. We had to work on them. We set aside time to reflect upon these ideas. When called for, we put pen to paper. We discussed them with someone in our family, a friend or a mentor (often called a sponsor), and in meetings together. We shared our understanding of the concepts embodied in these steps, and the ways we applied them to our individual circumstances. We brought these steps to life — to our lives.

We know, now, that every area of our lives will benefit in some way if we apply the strategies embodied in these steps.

In Step One, we became honest with ourselves and learned to admit when we have a problem.

Step Two introduced the belief that there was much in life (besides medicine) that could restore us to wholeness, so in Step Three we found the faith to surrender ourselves to those restorative influences, includ-

ing a Power greater than ourselves.

Step Four was the beginning of real personal insight and self-awareness. Honesty and trust were necessary qualities when it became time to share our personal inventory with another in Step Five. This was also the first opportunity to express feelings and intimate details of our lives with someone, beginning the end of our isolation.

Step Six saw us become ready to accept help from outside ourselves in dealing with our basic needs and problems, and in Step Seven we relied upon our developing humility and receptivity in order to take advice from others and make the necessary corrections in our lives.

Steps Eight and Nine, taken together, were about justice and restitution, and about personal responsibility. In these steps, we did our best to make amends to others, setting things right and restoring healthy relationships wherever possible.

Then, recognizing that our isola-

tion and distress had been largely relieved by our actions and the changes we had made, we developed a Tenth Step practice of monitoring our internal state of well-being on a regular basis, acknowledging when new problems arose.

The principles of Step Eleven are ones of remaining connected to others from whom we draw support and guidance, including a Higher Power of our understanding. Discussion, prayer and meditation opened the channels of communication necessary to achieve these goals, and foster our spiritual growth. These are the principles that led to our revitalization.

While perfect application of these principles is not possible, our best effort in this regard is. When it seems like our troubles will never resolve, an honest examination of our circumstances will reveal certain progress. And incremental, ongoing progress is the way of our growth, even if we crave instant relief. This is the natural, spiritual journey with which we have become familiar.

As we have learned these lessons, we have also discovered the value of carrying the message about revitalization to others. Unlike the depletion that resulted from the way we used to give of ourselves, sharing the strength of our healing experience sustains us. "We keep what we have by giving it away," it has been said, again illustrating a paradox of healing.

Now we are role models for others, actually living the lives we have recommended. Most importantly, we set a powerful example of respect and preservation of our own humanity for students and residents who are training to become practicing physicians themselves. This may be the only way to finally break from the tradition of self-sacrifice that we have come to believe has not served us well. One doctor, one person at a time, we are shedding those traditions and the suffering attendant upon them. Painstaking, perhaps, but beginning with the healing of one physician is the healing of that which ails the profession.

Conclusion

The principles of these Twelve Steps are not offered in a hypothetical sense. They are practical, and are in use. There are many physicians worldwide who, because they have other problems which have introduced them to a Twelve-Step way of life, have learned lessons very much like the ones described here. These doctors have balanced lives which medical practice no longer imposes upon. This remains true long after the original problem, such as alcohol or drug dependence, goes into remission.

The individuals who maintain a life-long adherence to principles such as these are our inspiration. They experience the richness and joys of life to an extent previously un contemplated. And the best part of it is that their acceptance of everything life has to offer, their serenity, peace, and restored humanity, is available to any of us. All we have to do is ask. OMR

Dr. Kaufmann, CCFP, FCFP, a former family practitioner, is medical director of the OMA Physician Health Program. Dr. Kaufmann is certified in addiction medicine by the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

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.**