

ADDRESSING GROUP CONFLICTS

by the **Unity Committee** of the **Chronic Pain Anonymous Telephone Meetings Intergroup**

CPA's Twelfth Tradition reminds us to "... place principles before personalities". However, from time to time, difficulties arise at meetings which cause uncomfortable feelings. The Unity Committee of the Intergroup that serves the telephone meetings is offering support to navigate such situations. The Intergroup has no authority over the groups; it can only make suggestions based on Twelve Step literature, experience of long-time members, and our guiding Twelve Traditions. Here are some suggestions:

- a. Assess the conflict. Is it really a problem? Is it likely to affect newcomers, or to cause ongoing resentments? How likely is it to happen again? Does it cause confusion about the purpose of CPA meetings? If any of these is true, it should probably be addressed. If not, perhaps it can be let go. Discussion with a sponsor or other experienced CPA member, and/or prayer and meditation may answer the question of whether to take action.
- b. Remember that compassion is a valuable spiritual aspect. Most of us come to CPA because our own ways of dealing with chronic pain, disability or illness are causing unhappiness in our lives. We may be consumed with anger, grief, or self-pity. Some of us may even have psychiatric disorders well outside the scope of Chronic Pain Anonymous. We do not have to allow anyone to make our meetings chaotic or unwelcoming, but perhaps we can be tolerant where possible, especially toward our newest members.
- c. Avoid gossip. For those of us dealing with isolation, pain and fear, talking about others' perceived shortcomings may seem like an appealing distraction. In practice, such talk can cause harm to all parties involved. Whenever possible, avoid using specific names of the offending members. Consider seeking guidance from a CPA member from a different group. Above all, make sure that it is concern for the group welfare, not private dislikes, that motivate the search for a solution.
- d. If appropriate, speak to the member one-on-one. Confrontation is uncomfortable, but can be done in a loving spirit, and is best done privately. For example, you might say, "I feel like the group's guideline about (crosstalk, religion, specific medications, etc.) is being ignored. I feel unsafe sharing when this happens," or "I'm worried about how this affects newcomers."
- e. Bring your concern to the Group Conscience meeting. Hopefully, your meeting has a regularly scheduled business meeting at which you can raise your concern. If not, you may need to ask the group to schedule a special business meeting to discuss the item.
- f. If you disagree with a Group Conscience decision, consider waiting a few months to see whether the situation improves, or whether the group might be willing to discuss the item again. However, if you truly believe that the problem is causing newcomers to stop coming, or existing members to leave the group, you might wish to pursue it further.
- g. Contact the Intergroup's Unity Committee. The Unity Committee* is made up of longtime CPA members who have done service in CPA and/or other 12-Step Fellowships beyond the meeting level. Send an email with the word "Unity" included in the subject line to cpaphoneig@gmail.com. Briefly describe the difficulty and what has already been done to address it. The Unity Committee will acknowledge your email and, usually within 3-4 weeks, send a response. The response may include references from Twelve-Step literature, experience of longtime members, and may include suggestions for handling the difficulty. Always remember that the Intergroup has no authority over the groups; it can only make suggestions.

- h. If truly necessary, bring the concern to the CPA Board. This action should be reserved for items which affect CPA as a whole, rather than an individual group. An example might be someone publishing literature using the CPA name, or advertising meetings called Chronic Pain Anonymous that do not carry the CPA message using the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. You can ask the board for help by attending the monthly Board meeting, asking your Group Rep (GR) to bring the item up at the Board meeting, or sending an email to info@chronicpainanonymous.org.

*At this time, the only CPA intergroup is the one that serves the telephone meetings. Other intergroups will likely be formed in the future. If you would like help with a difficulty occurring at a different type of CPA meeting (such as face-to-face, webcam, or text chat), we will offer help as long as it is a challenge that could occur at any CPA meeting. Problems with meeting locations or technology, for example, would be outside our scope.