

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Overseers, Ministry and Counsel,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends meetings*

Vol. 6, No. 3 • March 1999

Alcoholism in the Meeting

by Alex Scott

Alcoholism is not something we often think about concerning our meetings. Could it be that nearly all meetings have active or recovering alcoholics and are unaware of it? In this issue, PCN editor, Patricia McBee, interviews Alex Scott, an experienced Overseer and alcoholism counselor, about his perspective on how our meetings can support Friends in recognizing and recovering from alcohol abuse. The reflections of this seasoned Friend may be useful consideration of other forms of substance abuse as well.

Pat McBee: How do you see alcohol abuse affecting our meetings?

Alex Scott: I think it is present in every meeting to some extent or another. One in 10 people in the general population is having a problem with alcohol. I don't know whether Friends exactly fit that statistic. My sense is that Friends come close to the general population.

P: What constitutes "having a problem" with alcohol?

A: Addictions can be identified if any kind of behavior that we're doing interferes with any significant aspect of our lives – our families, our jobs, our hobbies, our creative activities, or our spiritual lives. It is rather a broad definition but I think that it's one that works. A problem drinker, then, is someone whose drinking interferes with other aspects of his or her life.

In a meeting one of the tip-offs might be that someone is not fulfilling his/her responsibilities and is always making excuses. Or a number of things might add up to tell the meeting that something is not right -- marital problems, for example, might surface an underlying problem of alcoholism, or someone loses a job or has a problem with gambling, or you

see a family in crisis; it might manifest itself in a variety of ways.

P: You're saying that a number of things can go wrong in the lives of meeting members, and alcohol abuse may be an underlying cause. What can the meeting do if it becomes concerned about possible alcohol abuse?

A: This is a tough situation and you're going to find yourself challenged in terms of your skills and your comfort level. The ideal is to intervene at the earliest possible time so that people don't have to hit bottom; they don't have to self-destruct. Even though it may seem intimidating, it is better to address something you're concerned about and to resist the temptation to hide behind a sense that you don't want to intrude.

Friends should start with being in touch with a knowledgeable person or support organization who



Alex Scott

can give guidance about how best to support a person toward recovery. The local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) office can tell you about what resources are available in the community or give feedback on whether the particular behaviors people in the meeting have observed are something to be concerned about. AA is usually very helpful and very knowledgeable and keeps information confidential. In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Overseers can be in touch with the Friends Counseling Service for help in considering the best way to proceed.

P: Let's look at a scenario in which one by one a handful of people in the meeting begin to realize that something isn't right with a certain member. And they take it to Overseers and say, "Things just don't look right here, and we don't know how to reach out." How can Overseers respond?

A: A first step would be some exploration of family members if they're available, or friends, or people who know that individual. "Is Charley OK?" "Do you see these kinds of behaviors?" I think there needs to be a gathering of information to try to understand what is really happening. Is the fact that the person is worried about a sick aunt causing the

behaviors that have caught meeting members' attention?

If you find that you have reason to be concerned it is important to talk with the person directly. How Overseers approach someone largely has to do with the relationship of person to person. It is always best when someone who feels close to or is comfortable with the person can approach her or him in a non-threatening way.

P: What happens if you talk to a person or a spouse who says, "We're fine, mind your own business."


A: Well, that's not uncommon because of the shame, guilt, and denial connected with alcoholism. You need to pay attention; if you are correct in your suspicions there will be another opportunity. It is an ongoing situation. But it is important not to support the denial. You can state the behavior you have observed and express concern. You can say, "Charley (or Henrietta), you had a bad patch back there last week, is everything OK?" Or, "You used to do your committee work, but now deadlines come and you don't deliver, and that's not like you. I'm wondering what's happening."

Again, it's the relationship. You work to create relationships in the life of the meeting so that when a problem comes up you can say, "Henrietta, I've known you for years. I see changes, and I'm concerned about you. So don't be surprised if I keep coming around and saying, 'How're you doing?' or 'How's Charley?'"

P: If a spouse comes to Overseers and says, "I think my partner has a drinking problem, and I'm scared and I don't know what to do." Then how might the meeting respond?

A: Remember that people are often ashamed to admit alcohol abuse within their families, so take care to be accepting, supportive, and nonjudgmental. Try to find out what kind of help this spouse is really needing when he or she asks for support. Also remember that this isn't something that has been on the scene for just a week or two. The couple more than likely have been round and round about this. What's happening? How long has this been going on? Does he hit you? Does she get into trouble at work? How are the kids doing? Has some kind of crisis precipitated the spouse's approach to Overseers?

Overseers goal is to help spouse address concerns with the alcohol abuser in appropriate way.



Pendle Hill

Strengthening Meetings

Pacifist Witness for Quakers and Mennonites
Rebecca Kratz Mays and John Ruth · April 9-11

Reading Scripture with Early Friends
Michael Birkel · April 9-11

Healing Life's Wounds
John Calvi · May 7-9

**Transforming Ourselves:
Finding Creative Responses to Conflict**
Co-sponsored with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)
Stephen L. Angell, Robert Martin & Deborah Wood · May 28-31

Inquirers' Weekend: Basic Quakerism
Chel Avery and Claudia Wair · July 16-18

For more information on these and other programs contact
Shirley Dodson, ext. 127 at (610) 566-4507 or (800) 742-3150
Box FR · 338 Plush Mill Road · Wallingford, PA 19086
www.pendlehill.org · shirley@pendlehill.org

I would get the spouse in touch with a support organization like Alanon or with a professional knowledgeable about alcoholism. If the addict or a family member is in acute risk of harm the Overseers will want to assist the spouse in taking immediate action to protect whoever is at risk. If the situation is less acute and the spouse is less clear about what support she or he needs, a clearness committee may be useful to identify issues or see that there are no issues. It can create a setting in which there can be open sharing to weed out what is significant and what can be worked on. The clearness committee should include knowledgeable people, who have observed the behaviors and are trusted by the individuals involved.

P: I have heard that people won't deal with addiction until they hit bottom, but you said earlier that it is

best to intervene early so that an alcoholic doesn't have to hit bottom.

A: Most early intervention programs deal with education and try and help a person to understand that they can get help and what it is that they're really dealing with. I think a lot of it is ignorance, that people really don't know

P: They don't know they're addicted?

A: They don't know they're addicted. There are all these things: "I'm married, I have a family, I work, I bring home a check, I go to meeting, I do this, I do that. So I have three or four drinks at night before I go to bed, but I go to work." They are just not aware. But the wife would say, "Charley, you don't do anything with the kids. When was the last time we were out? You come home, you sit in a chair, and you drink. That's what you do." Sometimes you see

One meeting's experience

On a recent Sunday morning after meeting for worship at Willistown Friends Meeting in Chester County, Pennsylvania, three members were talking. One woman talked of her brother who got drunk one night and threatened to jump off the roof of the house. A man related that he was going to fewer support group meetings and that drinking was starting to look good to him – again. The other woman related that the decision not to visit her daughter over the holidays because of her daughter's drinking had strengthened the relationship between mother and daughter.

Although somewhat unusual in most circles, this type of conversation is fairly regular at Willistown. A group of around twelve members and attenders has been getting together for three years sharing their experiences, hopes, and sorrows in a supportive and community building way. By talking together they have worked out alternatives to many crisis situations that can accompany abusive alcohol and drug use. In doing this they have built and strengthened the sense of community in the meeting.

While attitudes toward addictive behavior still carry a social stigma, this group of Friends work to actively deter prejudice and social shunning, whether actively hostile or patronizing, with clear statements based on love, understanding and compassion for all. It was therefore an important event for the greater spiritual community when the Meeting for Worship for Business at Willistown acknowledged this ministry in a minuted letter.

Gatherings of this ever-changing group have taken different forms over the years, but center on:

- A regular worship-sharing group that attracts Friends and members of area 12 Step groups. The simple format of inspirational reading relating to meditation and/or addiction followed by speaking from the silence has been enriching for many. It has also attracted several attenders to the meeting for worship on Sunday morning.
- An eight week course, Nurturing the Spirit in Recovery, designed to focus on ways that meditation and the Light within can influence the difficulties of living with addictive behavior, ones own or that of a family member or friend. Along with practicing stress reduction and centering prayer techniques, ample time is given to discuss how spirituality is affected by addictive behavior.
- Meeting for Healing to pray over a specific event or situation. We have gathered to pray for the healing in a family where the son was addicted to gambling and to pray for all those affected by drinking during the holiday season.
- Telephone calls play an important role in helping all of us staying in touch with one another. Having someone to talk with can save a day or just put it back on track.

For more information on the experience in Willistown Meeting or to learn about the course on Nurturing the Spirit in Recovery, contact Richard Squailia, at (610)648-0378 or e-mail rit@mbsr.com.

people who are hurting and you may not know why. And sometimes you may need to help them see that they're hurting – help them identify their behaviors.

P: OK, so now let's say that the Overseers are pretty clear that there is a problem. Perhaps the spouse or other family member has asked for the meeting's support. Approaching the person who may be addicted would be pretty tricky.

A: What you're talking about is the potential of denial. At some point the individual needs to be spoken with clearly and directly about the behavior and its effects on others. It is often best if more than one person meets with the individual, not one person alone. It could be members of the family who are

Friends Counseling Service

The Friends Counseling Service provides confidential services to individuals, couples, and families in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Service is not denied because of a person's lack of means. The counseling service coordinator, Deborah Cooper, is available for consultation with meetings about situations in which a counselor might be helpful.

Friends may call a counselor directly or speak with Deborah Cooper for a referral by phoning her at 215-248-0489.

Henry Beck, Ph.D.
Bala Cynwyd & Lansdale PA
610-664-5443

Ray Bentman, M.Ed.
Philadelphia, PA
215-985-1314

Terence Carroll, ACSW
Philadelphia, PA
215-473-2600

Deborah Cooper, M.Ed.
Philadelphia, PA
215-248-0489

Teresa A. Glatthorn, M.A.
Hatboro & Doylestown, PA
215-672-6627

John L. Hall, Ph.D.
Downingtown & Mt. Airy, PA
610-458-9060

Harriet Heath, Ph.D.
(parenting issues only)
Haverford, PA
610-649-7037

Gary M. Johnson, Ph.D.
Wilmington, DE
302-656-1295

Judith Owens, M.A.
Voorhees, NJ
609-435-2121

Beth Resko, ACSW, LSW
State College, PA
814-238-1880, #16

Karin M. Sannwald, ACSW
Berlin, NJ
609-767-6471

James J. Saxon, Ph.D.
Swarthmore, PA
610-544-7583

John Scardina, Ed.M.
West Chester, PA
610-696-2153

Fran Van Allen, M.A.
Philadelphia & Media, PA
610-358-3212

Lindley M. Winston, M.D.
West Chester, PA
610-431-3955

supported by the meeting or a counselor. It could be someone trusted by the person and knowledgeable about alcoholism, perhaps a meeting member who is in AA. The goal is to get the person into treatment and to get support for the family.

There is a formal procedure, done under professional guidance, called an "intervention." People who care deeply about this person are called together, and the individual in question is present, and people share openly what they have been observing and how they have been affected by the person's behavior. There is a whole agenda for how an intervention takes place. It is really confronting the individual, in a loving, caring, and limit setting way, to get the person to take a step, to get him or her to acknowledge the problem.

The usual procedure is to have already made arrangements to have the person go from that meeting directly to a treatment center. The goal of the intervention is to have the person accept those arrangements. A meeting could be a good place to have a formal intervention. Hopefully, we can do it in a positive, caring way. The folks in that group need to be prepared ahead of time so they know what to do and what not to do. It is very likely that they are going to be confronted with anger, manipulation; all the skills that individual has used to maintain the addiction may be brought to bear in this group. The group needs to be prepared to know how to handle it.

P: What is the spiritual dimension of all this?

A: An addiction is a disease of the body, the mind, and the spirit. As I have listened to people's stories, what I hear is that the spiritual side of their lives is really bankrupt. What happens in an addict's life is that they serve the addiction. The primary goal in their life becomes serving the addiction. It's that compelling. It's that demanding. That's what they have left, the addiction. Addiction has become the organizing principle of the person's life. If you're serving something that profoundly, there's not much room for spiritual life. As an addict begins to give up the addiction, there is space to welcome spirituality back into his or her life.

Getting in touch with spirituality can be part of the recovery process. The realization that you're bankrupt and you've got to start somewhere can be a spiritual opening – "let go, let God." If someone is going to effect a healthy recovery, they're going to have to address the spiritual component as well as the body and the mind.

Announcements

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Our Meeting Overseers have subscribed to PCN since its beginning. It is a wonderful resource. I have just read the latest issue on Conflict and Abuse and then referred back to the issue in which Arlene Kelly wrote about "Dealing with Difficult Situations." Then I searched for and reread "Meeting Support of Marriage and Couple Relationships." After that I went through my file of PCN and discovered that I am missing 3 issues from the complete set.

From the announcement in the January issue, I learned that I can purchase them at \$1.75 each. To whom should I make out the check? Thanks for your help!

Cathy Gumlock
Lehigh Valley Meeting

Space Still Available For Nurturing the Nurturer Conference

March 11-14, 1999

This conference is sponsored by Friends General Conference for Friends who are called to care and counsel in their Quaker communities. It will be held at Penn Center, St. Helena Island, South Carolina. For information contact Lyle Jenks or Marsha Holliday at (215)561-1700 or e-mail nurture@fgc.quaker.org.

TIME TO RENEW

Enclosed with this issue of *Pastoral Care Newsletter* is the subscription form for Volume 7 which begins with the September 1999 issue.

On the drawing board for Volume 7 are issues on:

- supporting members who are caring for **aging parents** and supporting those who themselves are facing the challenges of aging,
- helping the meeting discuss the question of **marriage of gays and lesbians** in a spirit of love, respect, teachability, and faithfulness, honoring all members as they search for Divine guidance,
- reflections on the **role of Overseers**: what are our priorities in the care of members and how do we prepare ourselves for faithful service,
- the place of **clearness committees** in pastoral care.

If your meeting has recent experience with one of these concerns, please contact us. We may like to do a side-bar article on your meeting's experience or to incorporate your story into the main article. Phone Steve Gulick, (800)220-0796 x7068 or e-mail steveg@pym.org.

And, please send in your renewal this spring. It helps us prepare for the upcoming program year. Thanks!

It is very helpful if the Friends who are the support for a person and family recovering from addiction are grounded in their own spiritual life. Even if there is not an opening at first to talk about their beliefs, they can act out love and faithfulness grounded in the Spirit, and that can create a further opening. Friends can hold the person and the family in the light. And, when the person is ready, the meeting can welcome them back in the worship life and spiritual activities of the meeting.

P: Say more about the meeting's role when the person has stopped drinking and is in recovery – either someone the meeting has seen through the hard time or someone who comes to the meeting when they are in recovery.

A: The meeting can treat the recovering person as someone on a spiritual journey. Honor the courage and struggle that has led to this stage in the journey. Embrace him or her in the life of the meeting. And ask what kind of support would be most welcome.

A support system which reinforces the healthy, constructive part of oneself is a key in recovery. The more supports a person has – spouse, family, job, neighbors, AA, and the meeting – the greater the likelihood that they're going to be successful.

We should talk about relapse. Recovery from addiction is a long-term process and relapse is not unusual. A person might say, "Well, I haven't had a drink in two years. I'll have one or two and stop." It is not the end of the world. Hopefully that will be a learning process: "I can't do that. I thought I could, but I can't. Sometimes it is good to get it out of the road. "That's behind you now, what have you learned from it?" It can be a constructive experience.

Recovery is life long. I know people who have been in AA 20 years or more. They still have a sponsor; they may be a sponsor, but they still have a sponsor. They talk about "keeping it green" – staying aware of what an addiction is like both intellectually and emotionally.

P: I know of a situation in which a meeting was supporting a member who never overcame his alcohol addiction. Sooner or later the meeting members stopped being present to him because it was discouraging, then they felt guilty about it.

A: It is important to remember that not all situations have this unhappy outcome. Many turn out well, and we should enter the process with hope.

Sadly, some people will never get over the addiction. It has very little to do with the would-be helper. It has to do with some x-factor in that individual who is addicted. So, if at some point you see Henrietta who is self-destructing after all these years, you may need to set very clear limits on the meeting's involvement or even back out. Alcoholism is a chronically progressive deteriorating disease that can lead to death. That is why it is important for Friends to provide loving support to those who *are* working on their recovery.

P: How can we sum this up? What advice would you give your meeting if it were faced with a situation of alcoholism?

A: I would tell them that dealing with alcoholism is a difficult and long-term process:

- Remember that addiction is a disease that is overlaid with guilt and shame that make it difficult to seek and accept help.
- Remember, too, that recovery is an uneven process. Those supporting the recovery can't control the situation and can't make the person better.
- Provide support that is accepting and forgiving. At the same time, be clear about setting and maintaining limits.
- Reach out to the family and help them to find support for their recovery, as well.
- Seek support from a knowledgeable resource person who knows about the patterns and progress of addiction and can give guidance about how best to support a person toward recovery.
- When a meeting member is in recovery there may be an opening to do an educational session for the meeting about addiction and recovery.

- Most importantly keep in mind the meeting's special role in the spiritual dimension of recovery. Remain grounded and centered and act in the spirit of love and compassion.

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Alex Scott is a social worker who has worked as the director of a drug and alcohol program. He is a member of Radnor (PA) Meeting and has served as an Overseer and as clerk of that meeting. Alex is a former member of the Family Relations Committee and the Friends Counseling Service.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does our meeting build relationships within our community so that we are able to reach out in a time of crisis such as a concern about alcohol or other substance abuse?
2. Are we prepared practically and spiritually to intervene when there is a concern, or do we hold back out of a fear of intruding?
3. What resources are available to the meeting for informing ourselves before intervening in a case of possible alcoholism? Is there a resource person within the meeting? Do we know how to contact a local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous or Alanon? Are these numbers posted where have access to them?
4. Are we prepared to handle sensitive matters with confidentiality and discretion?
5. How do Overseers support one another in setting and maintaining appropriate limits, particularly in situations when there may be denial and manipulation?
6. How do we maintain clarity about the appropriate role of the meeting as it relates to the roles of the individual, the family, the counselor and others involved?
7. What has been the meeting's experience of providing support over a long period of time? How do we provide consistent support without unduly burdening a few Friends?
8. How do we nourish the spiritual lives of Overseers so that our caring reflects love and faithfulness grounded in the Spirit?

Pastoral Care Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Concerns Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Harriet Heath, clerk. Patricia McBee, editor. We are located at 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Comments are welcome. **Please do not duplicate without permission.** To obtain additional copies or to subscribe, contact Steve Gulick, at 215-241-7068 or steveg@pym.org.