

## HELP FROM FRIENDS

# Addict's Answer: AA-Like Group

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WILKES-BARRE, Pa.—You can call him Peter—he doesn't want you to know exactly who he is. He says it's what he is that is important: "I'm an addict. I can't forget. I live in a world of temptation."

Peter considers himself an addict even though he says he has been off drugs for 3½ years. He credits his "sobriety" to Narcotics Anonymous, a nationwide addicts' group patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous. In NA, as in AA, members help each other.

The condition Peter made before—that his full name not be used—is an NA rule. It helps the organization by making it more prominent than any specific member. And it protects the member from being stigmatized by what the group considers an illness.

Peter's ties to drugs date back to his teens. He is 26 now, a construction worker. He spent 10 of his younger years using or wanting drugs, or in jail because of them.

He said his first was marijuana, which he got from friends, then LSD, and from there to stimulants and to tranquilizers such as PCP, known as "angel dust."

"I believed I couldn't live a minute without a chemical," he said.

He supported his habit by pushing drugs, and his brushes with the law began in 1974. He spent several months in jail after pleading guilty to possessing "angel dust," and got out early by "conning" a drug counselor. He says he went home on probation and overdosed on "angel dust."

When he went before the judge for sentencing after his overdose, he asked for—and got—placement in a "retreat"—a rehabilitation center. His life, he said, had become unmanageable.

He tried AA meetings after he left the center, but didn't feel right. He wanted to talk to people who shared his problem.

Then he learned of NA through a pamphlet, and he and a friend founded a fellowship. They began recruiting potential members from addiction treatment centers. He said there are now more than 200 members in the greater Pittsburgh region, including Wilkes-Barre.

There should be more, he said, but not all treatment centers know about NA, and many don't know enough to trust the organization. And he said addicts want an easy way—a "magic pill" that will make their dependency just go away. He said there is none.

NA is part of the treatment at Carrier Clinic, a private psychiatric hospital in Belle Mead, N.J.

"The reason we became so interested in Narcotics Anonymous is that it is identical to AA," said Barbara Fay, the unit's director. "The only difference is the drug of choice; the therapy is the same. And AA is the most effective recovery tool known to us in the field."

She puts her unit's cure rate at 60% to 70%. But she said it is hard to tell whether the treatment has worked because patients sometimes have a relapse.

Before a patient is introduced to NA, she said, the unit must first make him or her aware of the problem.

"When you're suffering from chemical dependence, you have a defense system based on denial," Ms. Fay said. "You have a disease which keeps telling you you're all right—the problems are out there—it's the wives, it's the husbands, it's lousy New Jersey."

NA works because of its commitment, she said. It teaches an addict to take each day as it comes, and never give up. "You think of this in terms of acceptance," she said. "This is why you hear so much about 'one day at a time.'"

NA's greatest failing, Ms. Fay said, is that there are not enough fellowships. And the patient who leaves still needs NA—and will for the rest of his or her life, she said.

NA operates without a professional staff, and is run from administrative headquarters in a 9-by-11-foot room in the Sun Valley, Calif., home of one of the group's founders, "Jimmy."

Jimmy said the staff consists of himself, his wife and some volunteers. One of NA's precepts is that it is run entirely by members. He relies on fellowships to handle problems themselves.

He said there are between 600 and 700 fellowships worldwide, with a total of about 25,000 members. Nearly all are in the United States.

Jimmy said the organization has grown rapidly in the last five years. "We've had good rapport with the media," he said, "and growth creates more growth."