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The New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) now offers a new, lower-cost membership option for registered nurses who are residents of New York. Through an agreement with the American Nurses Association (ANA), RNs can



become direct members by paying a flat annual fee of only \$300. In order to choose this option, nurses cannot be represented for collective bargaining by NYSNA. In addition, the new flat-fee option does not provide membership in the ANA.

If you are already represented for collective bargaining by NYSNA, your membership normally includes membership in the ANA and United American Nurse (UAN). Nurses who are not represented for collective bargaining may also choose membership in both NYSNA and the ANA. You can request a NYSNA membership application by calling 800-724-6976 ext. 285 or e-mailing membership@nysna.org.

Why join NYSNA?

Membership in NYSNA offers connection with thousands of other RNs through the oldest, largest, and most powerful nurses' organization in America. Members look to

NYSNA for networking, clinical updates, lobbying activities, and continuing education opportunities. Members receive association publications that provide the latest information, and can take advantage of NYSNA's library – the only professionally staffed nurses' association library in the country. NYSNA's programs and member services provide a wealth of expertise, assistance, and convenience, keeping you in the forefront of your profession.

Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.
Leo Tolstoy

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The first day of the rest of my life

Remember the expression, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life"? Does hopeful, idealistic prose like this ever become a reality in a person's life? It did for me. One day, the life I knew so well was over and I was given a second chance. That day occurred when I went into recovery for my addiction to alcohol and opiates.

Easter Sunday came early in March of 2005, and I was on duty as a staff nurse on a busy med-surg unit. I was 46 and had been a nurse for almost 25 years. After being sent home on administrative leave for diverting Lortabs from the hospital Pyxis, I suddenly realized I had no one to talk to and nowhere to go.

I was to cook Easter dinner for my family that evening, but it was only 12:30 in the afternoon. I wanted to have a drink, alone, and take a few pills, but my car drove me to my best friend's house. She immediately thought I was dismissed early for low patient census. Sharing my grave secret with someone so close to me on such a beautiful spring day gave both of us a sense of unreality. She knew I drank too much, but no one knew about the drugs. I can still hear her exact words, "Mary, what could be so bad"? I couldn't begin to answer her.

Over the next several days, the important people in my life learned of my situation: my doctor, my parents, my brother, and a few close friends. No one I associated with drank or did drugs like me. I was the excessive one in the family who always wanted more than enough of everything. The abuse was a symptom of my insecurity, my inability to set boundaries, my

constant fears, and my lack of balance.

I received a flyer about PAP and the SPAN Program from the hospital where I worked and made some calls two days after Easter. I was very alone and very afraid. A three-hour meeting with Paula (regional SPAN coordinator) happened at my kitchen table just three days after Easter. She truly sees the good in people, and

I quickly learned that honesty makes all the difference in forming relationships

I needed that. Paula presented me with a comprehensive program and diagrammed it so I could understand just what I needed to do. PAP and SPAN included 1:1 advocacy, counseling at an outpatient treatment facility with appropriate lab testing, AA, NA, and a work-site monitor when I returned to work. I quickly learned that honesty makes all the difference in forming relationships and communicating.

With time on my hands (as my job was terminated) and a road map to refer to, I attended my first SPAN meeting the day I met Paula. As a nurse, I had spent a lot of time promoting health support groups, but I had no idea of the depth of support someone could actually gain from one. Connie and Sue are superb facilitators in the Buffalo SPAN group who know and understand this illness. They motivate and nurture a close and caring cluster of people who are strangers but for a moment. They also bring some levity and humor to our group.

The realization that I belonged in this support group struck like lightning. I connected with a childhood friend there who became my guardian angel throughout my journey, and met people who knew exactly what I meant. It was like finally "coming home."

The very next day I attended my first AA meeting – another milestone! I met even more people who were just like me. The readings, the personal inventories, and the fellowship all made sense. This

If you do what you have always done, you'll get what you've always gotten.
Anonymous





Letter from Ellen

Ellen B. Brickman, SPAN Program director

It's fall already! September is officially Recovery Month. Those of us who work in the addictions field endorse, facilitate, and celebrate recovery all year long. Treatment is available and effective, but many people still face stigma in the workplace and socially that deters them from getting help. Make it a point this season to offer support to a friend in recovery, and to spread the word that recovery works.

(cont'd from front)

was what my sponsor meant when she often said, "You're right where you're supposed to be." I wanted the security and peace that came from dealing with life on life's terms, one day at a time. I could see in those people's eyes that this was how they dealt with life, and I wanted to learn to do this too.

After a month and many meetings, the first promise came true for me: "We will comprehend the word serenity, and we will know peace." After squirming around most of my life, anxious and unable to sit in my own skin for any length of time, I finally felt a fragment of peace. I remember thinking that if this is the only change that ever happens, it would be enough. But it was only the beginning of a new and beautiful way of life.

I surrendered my nursing license the first month of my recovery, and I worked on the plan all spring and summer. My sponsor and I focused on step work, and on some days a sense of balance started to come to me. I tried to remain open and teachable as I followed the suggestions of my sponsor and my fellow group members. The "next right thing" was as close to me as a prayer in my heart, but I had to be patient and listen.

The ominous steps four and five evolved slowly but naturally for me. When I expressed my inventory to my sponsor directly, I knew I did the right thing by not leaving anything out. I also knew that I had found exactly the right sponsor for me. She gave me strength to say things aloud that I never wanted to admit to myself. We explored my fears, resentments, and true identity, and examined my part in all of this. She told me that God made me just the way He wanted me to be. Those words gave me a feeling of relief and inner peace.

Toward the beginning of September, I met with the PAP in Syracuse, a sincere group of individuals who have an enormous understanding of the disease of alcoholism and addiction. I got my nursing license back and soon began working for a large health insurance company, in a pleasant and safe environment. A friend I've known for more than 15 years

and worked with in the past became my work-site monitor.

What I've gained on this continued road to recovery has enabled me to have a real life again. God did for me what I couldn't do for myself. This was the essence of humility working within my life. I am grateful for every step I had to take, and for the people who were there with open arms. I hope to be that light to others, especially in my new role as a sponsor, and to give back freely what was given so freely to me.

I can't yet seem to understand why addicts isolate so much and find it so difficult to pick up that "100-pound" telephone to tackle situations together, rather than alone. But I am still learning and pray that I will always be open to learn more.

Here are some personal suggestions:

- Don't "pick up" no matter what.
- Say a prayer.
- Go to a meeting (maybe at your home group, where you are known).
- Talk to another addict and share your experience, strength, and hope.
- Do the step work with a sponsor.

Also, get involved in things you enjoy. For me, it was playing my clarinet again in a community band, doing home improvements like painting and gardening, and surprisingly, joining a gym. I have and hope to sustain close associations with friends who make me feel peaceful and serene. Also, laughing, having fun, and eating an Oreo cookie ice cream cone all feel so good to me again! This entire journey as a package deal has made me "happy, joyous, and free."

I looked forward to this spring when, with God's grace, I celebrated two wonderful years of being clean and sober. I had planted more than 1,000 bulbs in my garden for this anniversary party, and I eagerly awaited their blossoms. Only 500 seemed like too few – but 1,000 were "more than enough." Perfect by my standards and way beyond my wildest dreams!

— Mary, a grateful recovering addict and SPAN participant, Buffalo, NY



National observances

SEPTEMBER

National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
www.recoverymonth.gov

SEPTEMBER 30

World Heart Day

World Heart Federation
www.worldheartday.com

OCTOBER

Talk About

Prescriptions Month

National Council on Patient Information and Education
www.talkaboutrx.org

National Physical Therapy Month

American Physical Therapy Association
www.apta.org

OCTOBER 10

World Mental Health Day

World Federation for Mental Health
www.wfmh.org/wmhd/abou.html

NOVEMBER

American Diabetes Month

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

Lung Cancer Awareness Month

Lung Cancer Alliance
(800) 298-2436 Lung Cancer Hotline
www.lungcanceralliance.org

DECEMBER

DECEMBER 1

World AIDS Day

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
www.unaids.org/en/default.asp

JANUARY

Cervical Health Awareness Month

National Cervical Cancer Coalition
www.nccc-online.org/awareness.php

National Blood Donor Month

AABB (formerly American Association of Blood Banks)
www.aabb.org

FEBRUARY

American Heart Month

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

National Wise Health Consumer Month

American Institute for Preventive Medicine
www.healthylife.com

MARCH

National Kidney Month

National Kidney Foundation
www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/kidneymonth/index.cfm

Workplace Eye Health and Safety Month

Prevent Blindness America
www.preventblindness.org

Ask the experts

Q. What is my legal obligation to report a colleague who I know has a drinking problem? We have been best friends since nursing school and co-workers for years. Her drinking has never affected her work and if I report her, I will feel like a hypocrite.

A. For licensed healthcare professionals in New York State, addiction is not only considered a disease but also professional misconduct. The law is specific regarding an employer's legal obligation to report a professional with an alcohol or drug-related problem: An employer must report the professional to the New York State Education Department Office of the Professions if the employer changes a professional's work schedule due to an actual or suspected substance-abuse problem.

The law does not directly address the legal obligation to report another colleague who has an alcohol or drug problem; however, licensed professionals have a *moral* obligation to do so, in order to protect the safety of the patients being cared for by the professional who may have a substance abuse problem.

In addition, reporting may very well save the life of the troubled colleague, in that it may force the individual to respond to the reported incident and, ideally, to face the larger issue of addiction.

You are invited: A journey to self

Barbara Joyce PhD, RN

You are invited on retreat: a time for personal reflection, learning, rest, and fun. The healing journey is a sacred personal path, one in which we are alone and not alone at the same time. This retreat will offer teachings from ancient traditions that can help us understand the emotional and spiritual issues involved in addiction and offer new pathways to healing.

Life is a challenge, sometimes to our deepest core. Walking the path of retreat offers us precious time in the presence of others on that path, time to take care of ourselves and grow in our knowledge and appreciation of self.

As a clinical specialist in psychiatric/mental health and holistic nursing, I have conducted workshops and retreats for many years. I know that by first being willing and secondly, by simply showing up, we already begin our healing. Through discussion, reflection, guided activities, rest, and relaxation, retreats are an opportunity to grow ourselves. Healing is hard work. It takes guts to make changes in our beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Retreats are a magnificent way to engage ourselves in the work and provide the opportunity to relax and enjoy time with each other. We go home refreshed, renewed, and ready for whatever our next personal steps may be.

I hope you will allow yourself this opportunity to play, rest, and learn new ways to journey further towards your self. I look forward to seeing you at the Expanding Healing Consciousness retreat, October 12-14, 2007. It will be held at the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center in Garrison, N.Y. The cost for this inspiring weekend is only \$110 per person, including meals and lodging (payment is required in advance). To register, contact SPAN at (800) 724-6976 ext. 265, or span@nysna.org. Until then, be well and happy!

SPAN SUPPORT GROUPS

Western NY

Buffalo, Canandaigua, Corning, Rochester

Central NY

Binghamton, Canton, Syracuse, Utica, Watertown

Eastern NY

Albany, Highland, Latham, Middletown, Plattsburgh

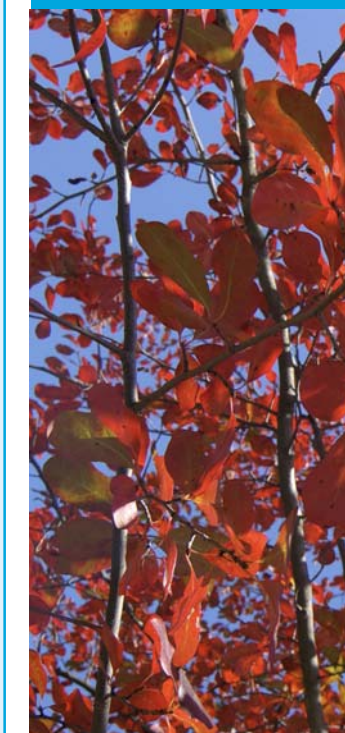
Metropolitan NY

Bronx, Brooklyn, Kew Gardens, Manhattan, Pleasantville

Southeastern NY

Bohemia, Deer Park, Malverne, Staten Island

Please contact your regional coordinator or the SPAN HELPLine at 1-800-45-SPAN-1 for more information.



You must be the change you wish to see in the world.
Mahatma Gandhi