

The Bottle!

By Anonymous

5.45pm – the last patient of the day was in the chair and the local anaesthetic was activating. The last patient then ... I could go home. My stomach felt tight and knotted and all I wanted was a drink to take the knots away and let me relax. Another hour till I got home and then that drink!!

It had been a pretty routine day with a busy patient list except that I had had another phone call from the bank manager telling me that the practice overdraft was now out of control and that no further funds would be made available. Despite my best efforts to control costs and maximise turnover, there was never enough money available to pay the mortgages, feed the family, pay the wages, supply companies and laboratories. And the tax bill – yes the tax bill was due in a month!

What was I going to do ... there seemed to be no solution! I felt like a cage had been put around me and the feelings and pressures were intolerable ... the only release was alcohol. How I looked forward to that first drink with its warm feeling penetrating down inside and radiating out to the tips of my fingers! The alcohol solved all my problems I could see more clearly now ... what I needed to do was to transfer the overdraft to another bank and re-mortgage the house ... again!

How could I be refused? I was a professional person – a dentist with a very busy practice, two cars, large house and ... oh yes ... large mortgages. After a few drinks I resolved to contact the bank in the morning and tell them where they could put their overdraft facility as I was going to transfer to another bank.

The next I remember was feeling cold and the room was dark. I looked at my watch ... it was 5.30 in the morning! I had again blacked out with no memory of what had happened or of what I had done or said to my wife and children after the first few drinks – I had not intended this to happen, but then I never did. All I could recall was that I had not eaten the previous night and this was not the first time these events had happened. In fact it was becoming pretty regular that I would come home, have a drink - a few drinks - and black out!

I was beginning to realise that I had a problem with alcohol – it had become something that I needed to take the pain away – I could not face the world without it neither could I control it once I had taken that first drink.

I had, not long previously, seen a piece in a dental magazine from a dentist whose wife was an alcoholic and who had recently died, at an early age. In this letter he expressed his powerlessness over his wife's drinking and how he had turned to Al-Anon to help him deal with his feelings. He wrote how sharing with people in Al-Anon had enabled him to deal with his inner feelings as he watched his wife being destroyed by alcohol and her eventual death. It was a heart rending piece and I could see how my life and behaviour mirrored that of his wife.

Coincidentally, there was a telephone number for The British Doctors and Dentists Group with the heading "Do you have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs?". I called the number but no one was there except a voicemail box – I left a message. That evening I had a call from a member who listened to my problems and then shared the story of his

relationship with alcohol and how he had led a life without alcohol for the last 5 years. 5 years! – I could not survive without alcohol for 5 days let alone 5 years!

His story prior to stopping using alcohol was not a thousand miles different to my story ... there were differences, of course, but the similarities were amazing ... and I thought that I was the only dentist in the whole of the UK who had this problem – how deluded was I! He suggested that I come to a meeting in a nearby town which I attended a few days later, having not had a drink for 24 hours.

My initial thoughts were that I must be in the wrong place ... these people were smiling and appeared to be happy ... and there were so many of them. As the meeting progressed, I was able to relate to many aspects of their lives. For the first time I was able to admit to myself that I was an alcoholic! What impressed me most of all was that these people were living their lives, running their practices, engaging with other people, dealing with living problems and restoring themselves and their relationships without alcohol.

I was encouraged to attend these meetings but also to attend as many meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as possible and to get some reading material from AA to help me understand the nature of this addictive disease.

I had a disease ... I was not a failure ... I was not weak willed ... I had a disease and it was up to me to treat it – nobody else could to that. Other people could encourage and support but the work in the treatment of my condition was down to me! I could no longer blame my parents, my wife, my children, the bank manager, my patients or anyone else!

I have not had a drink of alcohol since that meeting ... and that was many days ago. I now have a daily choice ... to drink or not to drink. I know from others that if I drink alcohol again, there is a near certainty that I will end up where I started ... in the bottle with all its consequences, and probably an early death! For today ... I choose not to drink alcohol or use mood altering chemicals.

My wife attends meetings of The British Doctors and Dentist Families Group and Al-Anon and to support her own recovery from my addiction and this family disease.

The overdraft problem ... that was eventually resolved once I stopped drinking and I went on to do further training, publish in peer reviewed journals and completed a post graduate degree. My finances are now in order with no debts and my relationships with my wife and children have been rebuilt ... family life is good.

My wife and I are just about to leave for 2 weeks in the sun in our holiday home in southern Europe.

It has not been an easy journey ... but it certainly has been a rewarding one. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that life could be this good. I am intensely grateful to my wife and family for their love and support over the years as I am to my fiends in the fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous and The British Doctors and Dentists Group.