



December 7, 2007

**Greetings from the President,**

As the end of the year approaches, so does the end of my term as President of NCAMHP. I appreciate the fact that I have had the opportunity to serve in this capacity, and at the same time am very grateful that the end of my term is fast approaching. Eric Alan Olsen, MFT is the President for 2008, and it is with confidence that I pass the compass on to him.

I look back over the year with satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment at the amount of work the 2007 Board has done on behalf of NCAMHP. I immensely appreciate the dedication that each board member has demonstrated in providing excellent leadership for the organization. My hat's off to each of you; Eric Alan Olson; Heather Breen; Patt Jones; Margaret Clarstrom; and Katherine Salinas. Thank you!! Heather Breen and Margaret Clarstrom will be stepping down from the Board this year.

Some of the accomplishments are:

The negotiation of up-to-date annual contracts with the people who provide fee for services to NCAMHP--these Independent Contractors are Gail Narum, Education Coordinator; Suzan Anderson, Administrative Assistant; and Justin Loch, Web Master.

The Board has been working on curtailing expenditures since 2004. This has been an ongoing and somewhat complex task, but our efforts seem to be making a difference. We came out in the black in 2006 for the first time in several years. NCAMHP Treasurer, Katherine Salinas reports we seem to be on track in that regard this year, though final figures will not be available until sometime in the first quarter of 2008.

The Directories (Red Books) were delivered to your mailboxes when we told you they would be, November!!! It is a big accomplishment to get the process established to download the directory straight from the website to the publisher, to the mailer. Getting the 'bugs' worked out of this process has been the major factor over the last two years that has delayed publication of the Directory. (An aside concerning the directory---each member received two directories, this was due to an error made in the labeling/ mailing process--you will not get two directories next year.)

Significant progress has been made toward using our website more effectively. E-Notices are being used and a process for having a much more organized way of 'publishing' a newsletter has been worked out. **The new co-editors** will be in charge of providing you with additional information.

Speaking of the new Co-Editors---- brings me to another goal accomplished, Board Recruitment!! **Tim Gomersall, LED, Antoinette Martin, and A. Scott Greer, PhD** all joined the Board in November. The Board has approved Scott as Secretary, and Antoinette and Tim as Co-Editors (see page 4).

Our new board members bring with them new energy, fresh ideas and much enthusiasm. Welcome! To the membership at large I leave you with warm wishes for a holiday filled with happiness, and a new year abundant with joy, peace and prosperity. Looks as if I'm at the end of my page.....

Nedra Johnson

Raindrops flying on the wind  
Winters storm unfurled  
Flames dancing in my fireplace--

## Self-care during the Holidays

---By Faith Mason, MFT

As mental health professionals, our charge is to attend to the best interests of our clients. It is easy to let our own needs take a back seat. We know, however, that therapist self-care is important as well, and holiday times are no exception. Our clients may bring to therapy their concerns and stresses related to the holidays, and these may mirror our own challenges and stresses. Countertransference may be especially keen at these times.

Some of the common stressors of holidays are money, food and drink, family matters such as in-laws, conflicting traditions, and custody challenges. In addition, any of these will be exacerbated by lack of sleep, or lack of time for all our activities. When we think of it, we will remember that stress can cause anyone to regress to a less-than-prime mode of functioning, even we therapists who have presumably engaged in so much of our own therapy.

I can think of examples from my own practice that have been pointed reminders of my own holiday challenges. Several clients are aggravated to have to deal with custody sharing for the upcoming holiday: Which days shall the children be where? How will clients cope with being alone on a holiday when their children are with the other parent? I was divorced when my children were 3 and 5, and for the next 15 years at least, the children changed households at 10AM on Christmas day, alternating which one was first. This sometimes meant getting up early and finishing the package hoopla in time to make the trip, or awakening in an empty house. It also meant that we never spent Christmas with the grandparents and aunts and uncles and cousins who live in Pennsylvania, and I felt homesick for them. We were among the fortunate ones. I never feared that my ex would abscond with the children; we usually consulted with each other so as not to give duplicate presents. I made extensive use during those years of self-soothing techniques, such as hot showers, walks in the woods, journaling, bicycling, and spending time with friends, and later with the blended family that we formed with my new partner. We still, however, find it a challenge to arrange to be in the same place at the same time for even a one-day gathering.

For many clients, money matters are especially distressing at holidays. The usual crunch is increased by wondering how to do even a modest amount of gift-giving. This is the time of year when clients have the most trouble paying for therapy. I have learned the hard way not to allow clients who have economic stresses to run up an unpaid balance, because not being paid soon leads me to feel resentment, which puts a dent in therapeutic rapport, and not being paid doesn't help my own economic state!

Many of our clients struggle with their relationship to alcohol and other mind-altering substances, and holidays with both parties and stresses can make this struggle especially difficult. I remember after I took the first course in addictions in graduate school, my eyes were opened to the centrality of alcohol at so many family gatherings I attended. Suddenly I noticed that when we

### Self Care During the Holidays (Cont'd)

visited my uncle, he had two martinis before dinner, wine during dinner, and two scotches afterwards, and I noticed that his volubility was not always pleasant. At one friend's house, where I used to go for New Years to watch football, the day started with gin fizzes and ended in family fights, so when I hear clients describe similar gatherings, I notice that I tighten up in my chair and become not quite so good a listener and more inclined to give anxious, unwanted advice. Some of the time I remember to take a deep breath and be present in the room. Sometimes it is after the session when I realize I was distracted.

As human beings just like our clients, we mental health professionals are subject to the same stresses, but we owe it not only to our clients to take care of ourselves so we can be present to them, but also we owe ourselves the same empathy and kindness that they deserve. Here are a few activities we can do for our own well-being:

- Exercise: aerobics, yoga, tai chi, walking, bicycling, etc.
- Meditation
- Massage and other bodywork
- Walks on the beach - we have wonderful beaches in Humboldt County!
- Music, either listening or participatory
- Hot baths or showers
- Breathwork
- Reading for relaxation & pleasure, not professional reading
- Journaling
- Time with friends
- Keeping expectations reasonable
- Art, creativity, hobbies, an "artist's date" (as described by Julia Cameron in her books, especially *The Artist's Way*)

In addition, at any time when we find it difficult to be centered with a client, we may find it helpful to seek professional consultation. A colleague Or a professional in a supervisory position can help us to sort out our own issues that arise in our sessions with clients.

Something which often gets lost at these holiday times, with the pressures and expectations, is the spiritual meaning that this holiday time holds for many people. It can be helpful to find times and ways to be in touch with whatever this meaning can be for you.

Self-care for therapists is especially important at this time of year, but it is important all the time, and we can make this a habit or a pattern for ourselves by creating and following an ongoing self-care plan. This might look like scheduled times for exercise, meditation, bodywork and journaling. When these activities are regular, then we are practicing preventive medicine for ourselves. Best wishes to all for a filling, heart-warming, and relaxed holiday time!

Faith Mason, MA  
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist  
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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Caroline Isaacs is pleased to announce** Claire Sund will be rejoining her practice as a MFT Intern in January 2008. She offers a sliding fee scale, has some evening hours and is open to referrals. They can be reached at 444-0927, Caroline at ext #1 or Claire at ext #2.

**For rent; to share**, half-time, inexpensive, lovely office. Quiet, tree surrounded, furnished, available Dec. 1, month-to-month rental. Close to Humboldt county mental health offices, and near Henderson Center. If interested, call: Dorothy Kostriken, LMFT, 822 5767.

**E course in Italy with Bessel van der Kolk and Ellen Searle LeBel-** Learn “New Pathways to Trauma Treatment” with an expert in trauma research and treatment, include an optional course in supervision with local MFT Ellen Searle LeBel, and earn 20-26 CE credits. Lodging, wine tour and some meals included. May 26-30, 2008. Contact Ellen at 826-7900; [www.laltaliaVera.com](http://www.laltaliaVera.com).

**Announcements of up to 50 words are free of charge, can be submitted by members only and are limited to mental health service or related topics.**

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### **BENEFITS OF NCAMHP MEMBERSHIP**

- Advertising through a yearly published directory with over 900 copies sent to non-members; the are professionals who interface with NCAMHP Membership as Referral Sources.
- Use of an interactive Website
- An official mediation process to assist in the resolution of client complaints
- Sponsored workshops, bring out nationally known presenters to our local professional community
- General Meetings featuring guest speakers and provision of CEU Units
- Bi-Monthly Newsletter which provides articles from members & nonmembers, interviews, organizational information and announcements
- Provides Education Pamphlets that not only increase NCAMHP's Profile, but provide a good resource for members and their clients.
- Provides an opportunity for professionals to network and stay connected with one another
- Provides opportunity to learn as you serve through membership on committees And service on the Board of Directors

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**Did you know that:**

Altruistic acts bring peace of mind

Turning the other cheek can be noble and smart; People are less likely treat you inconsiderately if you have forgiven them their transgressions (of course this does not apply in abusive rela.)

The strong fragrance of rosemary and a milder fragrance of lavender, either can lower blood pressure if smelled daily over a three month period.

### **New Co-Editors and Board Members—Brief Introduction**

**Antoinette Martin**, Psychologist and Learning Disabilities Specialist, MA Psychology MA Education; Consultant to Northern California Regional Facility New Horizons Program (Humboldt County Probation Department).

**Tim Gomersall, LEP**, Private Practice in Eureka; RCRC Vender, Baby Signs Instructor, and Sylvan Learning Center Executive Director and Owner.

**A. Scott Greer, PhD**, Private Practice in Arcata, Foundation provider, a member of the APA and Chairman of the Department of Psychology at Ryokan College.

**Homophobia and Racism,**

**Are they lurking in our waiting rooms?**

By Carol Coal, LCSW

Discrimination and prejudice are so subtly integrated into the mainstream that we often don't see it. It can be particularly invisible in ourselves and in our therapy practice. How we present ourselves and our office sends a multitude of messages of which we are often ignorant. This subtle discrimination and prejudice can be damaging to our clients.

For example, go out into your waiting room. Look closely at the magazines you have chosen. Do you see Garden Gate instructing how to landscape a beautiful home, People magazine updating us on the recent doings of favorite celebrities, Cosmopolitan telling women how to "Make their man happy." Perhaps you'll find Travel with trips to peaceful places or The Utne Reader and Shambal Sun. Maybe there is even Sports Illustrated and a Highlights or two. Now look again and notice what is not in your waiting room.

The absence of a thing can speak considerably louder than it's presence.

Did you notice an absence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgenderd (GLBT) magazines for your clients to read? Was there any literature speaking to Native Americans or Latinos, African American or Hmong? How about for those with disabilities? Or are they absent? And if these magazines are absent, have we asked ourselves why?

How did it become O.K.. to be exclusive? Our exclusion becomes a statement which is reflective of our practice, as subtle as the statement may be.

If these magazines are absent, what do we, as the therapist say to ourselves.

"I can't have magazines that represent everyone."

"I want my office to be neutral, peaceful, not a political statement."

"I never really thought about it."

"I don't want to create distress for my clients who might be offended by GLBT material."

"It's about the relationship, not what is in my waiting room. I validate my GLBT, Native American, Hispanic, Black or Hmong clients in the work we do."

Have you ever wondered what these responses might mean to those who are not represented, to those who we have been essentially rendered invisible?

Let's imagine ourselves as that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered people coming into your waiting room for the first time. What if you were Native American, Disabled, Hispanic, Black or Hmong? What would the absence of our people, our culture mean to us? Would we have already anesthetized ourselves to the constant over representation

**Homophobia and Racism (cont'd)**

of the "dominate" culture; would we shrug it off as just one more demonstration of marginalization we have to live with? Would we make excuses? Would it validate our own sense of unworthiness, or would our anger and pain silently rage inside us? Would a small piece of us quietly die realizing that even this "queer friendly" and/or "culturally competent" therapist will not publicly acknowledge our existence?

In the 80's there was a bumper sticker that challenged the absence of attention, intervention, treatment and research into the AIDS epidemic. It said, "Silence = Death." This profoundly accurate, deeply disturbing statement is equally disturbing and accurate when we look at how we silence people of color, GLBT and/or those who are disabled.

This death while not physical, damages the very essence of the self. People of color, disabilities an/or GLBT experience the absence of themselves everywhere they go. The lack of visibility creates an atmosphere of invalidation, a sense that the world does not quite accept them, or only accepts them if they remain within its pre-designed box. At times the lack of acceptance is so vocal and hostile it is clear they are not wanted under any circumstances. They are in fact denied, marginalized, threatened and made nonexistent. How can a client fully enter into the journey of self exploration if they are marginalized before they even step through the door?

As therapists and social workers it is our job, our ethical duty, to create an environment of acceptance and validation for all our clients.

It is our job to create a place of safety where the self can be explored without judgment or fear. Our clients, alert to every overt and subtle message, notice the lack of their presence. If you ask them and they can be honest with themselves and you, they will speak of the immense energy it takes to shrug the invisibility off. They will tell you of the battle between self acceptance and internalized homophobia. They may speak of the tremendous amount of energy it takes to silence the rage; the pain it causes to experience the invalidation of the self each and every day. Validating that pain and acknowledging a person's existence can begin in our waiting rooms. It is not such a tremendous task to have magazines that represent all our clients. Yet, it can be a revolutionary act: an act that may challenge our prejudice, racism, internal homophobia, heterosexism, and white and class privilege. It most certainly can challenge our own fears and may just generate conversations among ourselves and our clients. It is not such a difficult task to have magazines that represent all our clients. Yet it will be significant to those who have been made invisible. It is not a complicated task to create a sanctuary where small pieces of our client's soul won't silently die realizing their "queer friendly" and/or "culturally competent" therapist avoids publicly acknowledging their existence.

"None-the-less," you say, "my office needs to be neutral and peaceful; not a political statement." The lack of total and equal representation of our clients is a political statement. And so, we must all ask ourselves,

"Which statement is it that I want to make?"

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