MEMO ON PARTICIPATION OF A.A. MEMBERS IN RESEARCH AND OTHER NON-A.A. SURVEYS

Since the early days of our Fellowship, the participation of A.A. members in research and surveys has been sought – and has occurred. In recent years there has been an escalation of concerns about alcoholism in all parts of our society. As a result, A.A. can expect that requests for participation in research may increase.

In general, within A.A. there is a favorable attitude toward research. As Bill W. wrote, "Today the vast majority of us welcome any new light that can be thrown on the alcoholic's mysterious and baffling malady. We welcome new and valuable knowledge, whether it issues from a test tube, from a psychiatrist's couch or from revealing social studies." Historically, participation has been worked out on a case by case basis. Some of the attempts to cooperate have led to strained relationships while more have been successful, mutually satisfying, and produced new insights.

How A.A. members might cooperate with research has been discussed by the trustees' Committee on Cooperation with the Professional Community. At the suggestion of that committee, we offer this memo both to those who would solicit the participation of A.A. members in research and to those A.A. members who will be approached about such request.

1. The best research relationships between A.A. members and researchers have been those in which the researcher has become thoroughly familiar with the Fellowship before making an inquiry about participation. At the same time, the A.A. members who would be involved have become acquainted with the researcher so that they trusted him or her, and have been convinced of the researcher's commitment, competence, integrity and respect for the Traditions of A.A. The investigator has been forthright in giving the A.A. members all the information about his or her research which they needed in order to make an informed decision about it.

2. For A.A. members, cooperating with the researcher and being part of research program raises most of the same issues as cooperating with any other non-A.A. professional or engaging in any other non-A.A. undertaking. The questions are amenable to the same kinds of solutions. See: "How A.A. Members Cooperate with Professionals" and the C.P.C Workbook. As long as there is frank communication and attitudes of open-mindedness and flexibility, it has proved possible to work out ways of participating in research which do not require A.A.

members to compromise A.A.'s Traditions and which permit the researcher to arrive at valid findings.

3. The researcher should be aware that Central Offices in A.A. cannot offer the kinds of assistance he or she may be used to from the headquarters of other organization, e.g. access to records, endorsement, etc. However, the researcher may receive some help from the General Service Office, Intergroup Offices, Intergroup Offices, and local offices of other kinds.

    a. Individuals in these offices may be willing to give the researcher their opinions about the projects and about their feasibility.

    b. Literature can be provided which will prove helpful to the researcher in understanding A.A., what it is, what it can and cannot do, as well as how A.A. members cooperate with non-A.A. undertaking.

    c. A copy of this memo can be provided.

4. Decisions about whether or not to cooperate in research are always made at the local level where the research will occur. Almost always the request for participation has been made to individual A.A. members who have then sought the cooperation of other members. In rare instances, the request has been made to a group. When A.A. members have decided to cooperate, it has been in their capacity as private citizens.

5. Those individuals approached about cooperation will want to make an informed judgment about whether to participate and about whether to seek the participation of others. Indeed, with the increased requests for research cooperation, it is necessary that selection take place. Some of the kinds of questions the individual might have are: What is being studied, by whom why and how; who will carry out the research at the local level; what will cooperation involve, e.g. interviews, questionnaires, amount of time; who will evaluate the findings; who will use the findings for what purpose; in the light of A.A. Traditions, is cooperation possible; what arrangements are made to ensure anonymity, etc.?

6. A.A. is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. Meetings are devoted exclusively to the A.A. program. No research which could interfere with this goal could be tolerated. Some groups have permitted questionnaires or interviews to occur after meetings provided that participation is on a personal, voluntary basis.

7. A.A. and its members are particularly concerned with anonymity. While most researchers are skilled at ensuring anonymity, A.A.'s concerns may raise unique issues. For example, as no A.A. can break the anonymity of another, there may be ticklish issues in soliciting cooperation from others. Some research procedures may also require extra precautions.

And, a final quote from Bill W. about cooperation with non-A.A.'s working to resolve the problems of alcoholism, "So let us work alongside all these projects of promise to hasten the recovery of those millions who have not yet found their way out. These varied labors do not need our special endorsement; they need only a helping hand when, as individuals, we can possibly give it."

We welcome additional information from researchers and from members of A.A. who have experience to share or comments to make.