

EDITORIAL COMMENT FROM JONATHAN FLIER, President L.A. CAMFT

These comments represent my personal points of view and reflections. – J.F.

I wrote in my President's Message about my joy in how much LA-CAMFT has grown and changed in the past four years; now I want to note my concerns about how the leadership change process has played out with our statewide association, CAMFT.

Eleven months ago CAMFT passed a major revision of our bylaws. I think this revision was created in the vacuum of a closed system. There seemed a sense of near panic that our membership would precipitously drop with the creation of a new, but similar mental health profession, called Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCC). **The solution**, generated in the closed system of the CAMFT staff and board, **was to rename the organization as the California Association of Mental Health Professionals*** (see footnote below) and to open full clinical membership to a wider group than just Marriage and Family Therapists. This huge change was ratified by a tiny fraction of eligible voters who had been lulled to indifference by the static system that had encompassed CAMFT for a very long time.

This is a classic example of the destructive force of entropy. The concept of Entropy states; if a system is static and does not bring in new energy, the system goes into a process of decay. Part of what created entropy at CAMFT was the election process itself. For many years, a nomination committee responsible for vetting potential candidates created mostly uncontested slates.

As we learned in our Family Systems courses, changes in standing systems are stressful. The system seeks a return to homeostatic equilibrium - sometimes by trying to avoid shifts through repressive actions in desperate attempts to keep individuals in the system from changing or by shutting doors to keep out the forces of change. If the attempt to stifle the developmental needs succeeds, the system faces decay. The decay saps the resources of creative energy, empowerment, and hopefulness. The system loses its resiliency and vitality.

The recently attempted Bylaws Revision created a stir in the system that awoke a sleeping giant causing bewilderment, anxiety, and consternation among many CAMFT members. A campaign was created that became known as SaveCAMFT, a group of volunteer MFTs who distributed information about the changes among the community of Marriage and Family Therapists throughout California. Over 2200 people signed petitions, sent to the CAMFT board and staff, demanding a return to the previous bylaws and a period of collaborative exploration to determine the direction our statewide organization should take in the near future. The Board and Staff tried to keep a lid on the protest, but soon began to acknowledge the exuberant and positive aspects of an awakened membership. The Board reversed their position and that reversal was ratified by the largest voting response ever experienced since the founding of CAMFT: 3603 reinstating the old Bylaws returning CAMFT to MFT control to 142 in favor of CAMFT remaining a generic mental health organization. Many, but not all, of the current board members and staff were relieved to feel they were no longer having to make decisions in the vacuum of an apathetic population.

This year, in a stunning repeat of prior election slates, , the CAMFT Nomination Committee, consisting of five members that include the current Board President, three past Presidents, and a former board member, chose to keep the status quo by creating uncontested seats for board officers and eliminating those who were "too different" regarding their ideas of how the business of CAMFT should be conducted.

In order to avoid this return to entropy, the SaveCAMFT group decided to create a slate of candidates for all five vacant positions. The CAMFT Nomination Committee allowed two of the SaveCAMFT slate to run, but rejected the other candidates. Fortunately, CAMFT bylaws allow candidates to be nominated through a petition process. SaveCAMFT was given only a few weeks to obtain the hundreds of to gather signatures required to nominating the full slate of five.

SaveCAMFT succeeded, obtaining over 400 signatures, and for the first time, we will have a fully democratic election with contested seats for every board position. I urge you to carefully view and evaluate all the candidates' statements and to vote when the ballots arrive the first week of March.

The closing date of the election is 5 PM on April 10th, but please mail your ballot back by March 31st. In the December 2013 bylaws vote, 5% of the voting postcards arrived too late to be counted. Please do not let that happen again – vote in March!!

This is not a time for indifference. The Affordable Care Act, the shrinking of the middle class in our country, and the growing concentration of wealth in fewer hands (including insurance companies), are among the many changes altering the world of mental health providers. CAMFT is our organization and it is one of the largest mental health organization in America. We need to be informed and active in how our collective dues are spent on our behalf and on behalf of all those to whom we provide our vital services. This election is a step in the right direction for CAMFT and could bring creativity, resourcefulness, and empowerment ending the destructive entropic force of indifference.

**Note: "Gerry, Steve and [Cathy Atkins] spoke and we wanted it to be clarified that neither Jill, nor any Board during Jill's leadership, voted on or considered changing the name of CAMFT. Thank you, Cathy Atkins, Acting Director, CAMFT" [Chapter Leadership Group e-mail correspondence, February 26, 2014]*