

Awakening A.W.A.K.E.!



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Sleep apnea presents a unique challenge to the physicians who manage it. Adherence to PAP, the gold standard treatment for sleep apnea, is poor. Research has shown that five to 50 percent of sleep apnea patients recommended for PAP either reject this treatment option or discontinue within the first week, and 12 to 25 percent of remaining patients can be expected to have discontinued PAP by three years [1]. A Cochrane Review of interventions to improve PAP adherence suggests that psychological and/or educational interventions may improve PAP usage, whereas mechanical interventions including Bi-PAP, self-titration, and humidification offer little benefit for increasing adherence [2].

Support groups may be a cost-free option for educating and assisting sleep apnea patients. In 1990, A.W.A.K.E. (Alert, Well, And Keeping Energetic) groups were formed by the American Sleep Apnea Association (ASAA) with the goal of enhancing the lives of those with sleep apnea by providing educational resources, patient-to-patient support, and real-life solutions. More than 100 A.W.A.K.E. groups are currently active across the U.S., with five groups in Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh was the first location to create an A.W.A.K.E. group; however, it is no longer active, leaving the closest active group more than two hours away.

With a growing population of sleep apnea patients in the Pittsburgh area, there is a need for the revitalization of the Pittsburgh A.W.A.K.E. group. Recently, an article in the Pennsylvania Sleep Society newsletter advocated for the creation of additional A.W.A.K.E. groups in Pennsylvania. The successful creation of a local A.W.A.K.E. group will require a city-wide effort from physicians and nurses, sleep technicians, sleep centers, home



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healthcare companies, sleep researchers, patients, and families. The following are essential to reestablishing the Pittsburgh A.W.A.K.E. group:

1. Coordinators or leaders to organize, publicize, and facilitate the meetings.
2. Speakers to present on relevant topics.
3. Individuals and organizations to promote and support (refreshments, meeting space) the group once established.

Please consider joining the effort to “reawake” the Pittsburgh A.W.A.K.E. group so we can provide our sleep apnea patients the needed support to be diagnosed and treated successfully. If interested in supporting this effort, please contact Faith Luyster, PhD, at luysterfs@upmc.edu.

References:

1. Engleman HM, Wild MR. Improving CPAP use by patients with the sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome (SAHS). *Sleep medicine reviews* 2003;7:81-99.
2. Haniffa M, Lasserson TJ, Smith I. Interventions to improve compliance with continuous positive airway pressure for obstructive sleep apnoea. *The Cochrane database of systematic reviews* 2004:CD003531.