

## LAP Notes: Some Tips on Warning Signs of Addiction

There are members of the legal profession suffering from some form of dis-stress, distress that can be alleviated with assistance. Many people are caught up in unhealthy, expensive, and often life-threatening addictions and/or other compulsive behaviors. Included in these are, alcoholism, drug addiction, compulsive gambling, and compulsive sex. By becoming familiar with some signs of dis-stress you can play a significant role in helping the dis-stressed person.

Alcoholism and addiction are diseases. The disease model has dominated addiction studies for many years. Addiction is a chronic, progressive, and incurable disease. Help is available and the earlier the help is sought the better the treatment outcomes are.

The person involved in an addictive/compulsive behavior often recognizes the physical, social, psychological, or spiritual harm of the behaviour. There may be an expressed desire to reduce or cease the addictive behaviour, however, change is not easy for an addict. However, given the right kind of treatment and support, the addict is able to have a normal, healthy, and productive life.

The addicted lawyer's work and family can be seriously affected. The addicted person can feel helpless, frustrated, ashamed, guilty, and hopeless and be unwilling, perhaps unable, to address the health issues squarely. Also, most lawyers spend their time dealing with other people's problems and they often do not want to seek help because after all "they are the helper". It is a natural part of the disease to deny having it and lawyers are brilliant rationalizers and excuse makers.

It is often difficult to identify an impaired judge, lawyer, law student, or staff member because of his/her efforts to conceal the problem. A lawyer is often strongly attached to having clients and fellow lawyers believe that she/he is a competent practitioner and so does everything possible to prevent others from knowing he/she has any kind of problem. The dis-stressed person often becomes more and more isolated and remote as the problem progresses.

In order to be of assistance you do not need to diagnose the illness, you only have to look for some signs based upon Attendance, Performance and Behaviour. If there are such problems address them. The Lawyers

Assistance Program is available to help and advise you about what you can do, give us a call. By helping to identify that there is a problem you can help to get your colleague, employee, or family member, into an effective treatment program.

It is natural and healthy to offer help to a friend in distress. Become familiar with the services offered by the Lawyers Assistance Program. You can save lives and protect your clients and your practice.

Some signs of dis-stress in a legal professional, include:

**Attendance**

Comes to work late and/or leaves early on a regular basis.

Misses court.

Frequently returns late or fails to return from lunch.

Misses appointments and scheduled meetings.

Frequently off work ill or unexplained absences, especially around weekends or holidays.

**Performance**

Procrastinates; misses deadlines.

Failure to return phone calls or correspondence.

Decrease in number of hours worked and/or billed over time.

Overreacts to criticism; blames others.

Performance declines throughout the day.

Erratic and variable performance or a noticeable deterioration of performance over time.

Errors in judgment, memory lapses, confused thinking.

Clients complain about performance/accessibility/communication.

Sloppiness with clients' trust funds.

Lack of organization, failure to complete necessary records.

Appears under the influence and/or smells of alcohol in the office or during court appearances.

**Behavior**

Unable to get along with or withdraws from fellow lawyers and other staff.

Deterioration of personal appearance and/or hygiene.

Behavioural problems at social gatherings, even where professional decorum is expected.

Tells lies, is dishonest or misleads others

Finances in disarray, credit problems, tax problems, disorganization.

Persistent health problems that are not being properly diagnosed or treated.

**High risk situations.**

Marriage or relationship breakdown.

Loss of a job or promotion.

Complaining of stress or overwork, looking “stress” or frazzled.

Deaths and grieving.

Malpractice claims, Law Society problems

Financial difficulties.

If you notice some of these signs, please give the LAP a call. We can help and want to help.