

Resources to help you find your footing

LAWPRO has learned through experience that the pressures that lawyers face in their jobs, and the related mental, emotional or physical problems, often lead to claims. The claim against the lawyer may be for “procrastination” or “poor communication,” but looking deeper we sometimes find lawyers overwhelmed by the stress of their jobs who have succumbed to addiction, depression, or just plain burn-out.

Adding to the problem is that lawyers often don’t want to reveal any “weakness,” so even if they know they have a problem they may not go to a colleague or pick up the phone and call the Ontario Lawyers’ Assistance Program (OLAP). For those lawyers who suspect they may have a problem but aren’t quite ready to confide in a peer, practicePRO’s Wellness page (www.practicepro.ca/wellness) has self-assessment tools, links and resources that are just a click away.

We’ve grouped our resources into three broad themes.

Getting Stress-Hardy

This section is tied to the Online Coaching Centre stress-related modules. These are quick self-assessments that can be completed in minutes. Also featured are a series of case studies on the debilitating effects of stress, based broadly on real scenarios that LAWPRO and OLAP have seen involving alcoholism, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Staying Healthy

Staying in good physical health can help ward off the effects of the stress. Long hours at the desk and poor fast-food diets are too common among the legal profession. In this section lawyers will find links to Health Canada’s Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/parq.htm) and Physical Activity Guide (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide), and the Dietitians of Canada assessment guide (www.dietitians.ca/). All of these resources provide a good start to figuring out how to get more exercise and eat right.

And to improve your mental health, why not think about volunteering? Studies have shown that this can greatly improve self esteem and satisfaction with life. There are links here to such sites as Charity Village (www.charityvillage.com/), which puts a volunteer in touch with an organization looking for one.

Addictions

Being able to recognize that one has an addiction problem is the first step on the road to both personal recovery and protecting one’s professional life and practice from the damaging toll an addiction problem can take. Alcohol, drugs and gambling are the major addictions seen in lawyers. The Wellness page provides links to self-assessments, Bellwood Health Centre (www.bellwood.ca/), Alcoholics Anonymous (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/), Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (www.camh.net/), Gamblers Anonymous (www.gamblersanonymous.org/qna.html) and many more.

Next steps:

If you’re a lawyer who is struggling with any of the problems mentioned above but don’t feel you’re able to openly speak about your issues to a professional or peer, please visit www.practicepro.ca/wellness to anonymously browse the many resources we’ve made available.

If on the other hand you are ready to work with a professional or willing to confide in a peer, contact OLAP at 1-877-576-6227 or visit OLAP’s website to learn more about the organization and its resources at www.olap.ca.