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November 2018 Newsletter

Volume I | Issue III | New Hampshire Lawyers Assistance Program

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NH LCL Monthly Meeting

Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers is a monthly meeting on the
SECOND TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH
of NH lawyers, judges and law students who come together for
free, confidential peer support for any issue that interferes with
professional competence. Absolutely confidential.

December 11, 2018 6:00 p.m.

The Airport Diner, 2280 Brown Ave, Manchester

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THE HOLIDAYS and SAD

Believe it or not, the holiday season is now upon us. Now it seems to come up faster than ever. There are those of us who crave the holiday season and look forward to it all year long. There are also those of us who dread this time of year and have a very hard time getting through it unscathed.

There is often a very real reason that that this time of year is difficult for so many. Its not the “Winter Blues” - a phrase that diminishes the seriousness of both the symptoms and the medical disorder behind it. The reason is Seasonal Affective Disorder or S.A.D.

SAD is a real and serious type of depression that comes and goes with the seasons, most often the winter season. It coincides with the changing of the clock or “Fall Back” when we stop utilizing daylight savings time here in the United States. Medically speaking, this cannot come at a worse time.

SAD is not a separate depressive disorder, but an exacerbation of an already present Major Depressive Disorder. So, if you already have Depression, you are much more likely to have SAD. As in Depression, a neurological chemical imbalance occurs which is prompted by shorter daylight hours and less available sunlight. This is different than Depression because not only is there difficulty with serotonin reuptake (getting the “feel good” mood hormone from synapse to synapse) but this neurotransmitter is working 5-10% more inefficiently than with Depression alone.

SAD is also marked with an overproduction of melatonin, the hormone responsible for regulating sleep. Because our circadian rhythms are off with the time change and with the lack of sunlight, this overproduction of melatonin creates the feeling of exhaustion, lack of energy and general difficulty getting up and getting going in the morning.

Symptoms of SAD:

5 or More Symptoms lasting at least 2 weeks

Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day;

Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in most activities most of the day, nearly every day;

Significant weight loss when not dieting or significant weight gain;

Slowing down of thought and physical movement;

Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day;

Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt nearly every day;

Diminished ability to think or concentrate nearly every day;

Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation without a specific plan or a specific plan for suicide or a suicide attempt;

Feeling “Sad” is not SAD. Feeling “Sad” is also not Depression. This is significant distress or impairment to social or occupational daily functioning. Inability to work, socialize or get through routine daily life is not simply “feeling blue” but a serious, yet common, medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, how you think and how you act. It is easily diagnosed, and it is easily treated.

It is easy to pass off recurrent depressive symptoms as situational or just going through a “bad time.”

However, the key to understanding and then treating Depression and/or SAD is in the duration. It is true that anyone can feel depressed because of a major disappointment, an ending of a relationship or grief associated with a significant loss. SAD is different because it lasts weeks, often months, for days on end. Very little that would “snap” someone out of a depressed mood will work for someone suffering from Depression or SAD.

A diagnosis of SAD is very treatable, which is good news to legal employers. If either Depression or SAD goes untreated the impairment of functionality translates to decreased productivity in the best of cases and legal malpractice in the worst. There is no reason for someone to suffer with SAD and no downside for employers to encourage diagnosis and treatment.

There is no reason to suffer through the holiday season. It may make for funny punch lines, but it is a very real, very serious and potentially life-threatening medical condition which requires care and attention.

38 million Americans struggle with Depression. 38% of lawyers report that they have suffered with Depressive symptoms during their legal career. 9% of New Englanders suffer with SAD, most of which lasts 40% of the year. The life, productivity and disability lost to Depression and SAD will be greater than that of accidents, cancer, stroke or any other health concerns, save heart disease. This is the number one problem not only facing Americans in general, but lawyers in particular. The lack of response, the lack of support and the lack of understanding is fueling this senseless epidemic.

Stop the stigma. Reach out to a colleague in distress. Let them know that there is ready help and support. The cure for this epidemic is open, compassionate dialogue. Make someone’s holiday with the best gift possible- show them you care and they are not alone. It costs nothing and is worth everything.

Treatment of SAD:

Medication

FDA approved medication for SAD are SSRIs which are selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, which help more serotonin move from synapse to synapse increasing a positive mood (Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, etc.); and

Bupropion, which is often used as an add-on to SSRIs when they provide an incomplete response (Wellbutrin, Zyban, etc.);

Light Therapy

Electric lights of 10,000 lux of cool, white fluorescent light for 20-60 minutes every morning. Replenishes natural light lost during the winter months;

Psychotherapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) which identifies negative thoughts and replaces them with positive thoughts and positive behavioral activities that stimulate a dopamine response (“feel good” hormones) to naturally elevate mood.



THE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

TERRI M. HARRINGTON, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NHLAP

REFLECTIONS ON A THANKSGIVING TRADITION

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. I love the food, the smells coming from a busy kitchen, and, of course, the leftovers. I love the marking of the autumnal season with the décor of reds, golds and deep oranges. But what I love most about Thanksgiving is the time spent with my family.

I'm not delusional- we are not the Cleavers. My family, both immediate and extended, can drive me nuts. Still, there is something about gathering around a formal table, sharing a beautiful prepared meal with the people that mean the most that really makes me happy. And grateful. I feel a tremendous amount of gratitude at Thanksgiving. Often, to the annoyance of the family members seated at the table with me.

I have a tradition of making everyone hold hands and say one thing they are grateful for before we start eating. My teenage boys have squirmed and rolled their eyes for years over this. I make them do it anyway. I firmly believe that in forcing the expression of gratitude from each and every person seated at the table creates a different atmosphere, if only for a few moments. Sure, one of them inevitably cracks a joke instead of uttering a real grateful thought, but even that is okay. Because I am grateful for what every individual brings to the table and, in turn, brings into my life. During the few minutes it takes to get around the table, I feel connected to my family like at no other time of the year. The verbal expression of gratitude forges a sense of family not only in proximity but in words. For those few moments, I feel truly blessed.

Then, the gravy gets passed, the game gets turned on and the little annoyances begin all over again. The rhythm of everyday life resumes. However, my sense of gratitude lingers long after the leftovers are a memory.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family.

Depression Help for Lawyers

Are you a lawyer, judge or law student with depression? You are not alone. According to a John Hopkins University study, lawyers lead the nation with the highest rates of depression. Lawyers also have the highest rates of suicide as a profession. An ABA Young Lawyers Division survey found 41% of female lawyers were unhappy with their jobs. There is help.

The Lawyers Depression Project (LDP), a group of attorneys who themselves suffer from depression, have launched a grassroots project aimed at addressing depression and other mental health issues in the legal profession. The group hosts a confidential forum at www.knowtime.com and weekly online peer-to-peer support group meetings, offering members the option of anonymity. To participate, members need only share emergency contact information with the group's founders (Joseph Milowic III & Aaron Kaufman, both attorneys who suffer from depression) to receive an anonymous knowtime email address for use with group meetings and to participate in the group's web forum. For more information, please contact Joe@knowtime.com

