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**ANNUAL PROFESIONAL CONDUCT
SEMINAR:**

**WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE
PRACTICE OF LAW, WHAT STRESSES
YOU AND HOW YOU DEAL WITH IT**

**Stress In The Legal Profession & Tips
For Managing It**

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Stress in the Legal Profession

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American Society of Addiction Medicine: 2015 Study Regarding the Prevalence of Substance Use and other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys

- **12,825 Licensed Employed American Lawyers**
- **21-36% qualify as problem drinkers**
- **Men higher proportion**
- **30 years and younger more likely to have higher score**
- **28% experienced symptoms of depression**
- **19% experienced symptoms of anxiety**
- **23% experienced symptoms of stress**

"To be a good lawyer, one has to be a healthy lawyer. Sadly, our profession is falling short when it comes to well-being. The two studies referenced above reveal that too many lawyers and law students experience chronic stress and high rates of depression and substance use. These findings are incompatible with a sustainable legal profession, and they raise troubling implications for many lawyers' basic competence. This research suggests that the current state of lawyers' health cannot support a profession dedicated to client service and dependent on the public trust." National Task Force on Lawyer Well Being: Creating a Movement to Improve Well-Being in the Legal Profession. (August 14, 2017).

A big factor in all of this is stress

- **Position of great responsibility with lives hanging in our hands**
- **Compassion Fatigue/Vicarious Trauma**
- **Financial Challenges – either debt or just maintaining client base and practice – creates pressure to work more hours**
- **Conflicting home and work priorities**
- **Pessimism, collegiality and difficult clients**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Keeping up with the law and the requirements of the various courts**
- **Predisposition and escape**

Stress

Stress is a physical, mental and emotional response to life's changes and demands. It is experienced in levels – from low to high. Not all stress is harmful. In fact, moderate stress can be positive, challenging people to act in creative and resourceful ways. When stress is high, however, it can be damaging and lead to serious health problems such as depression and heart disease.

Everyone experiences stress. Any number of factors may contribute to stress, including personality, physical and emotional health, personal relationships, major life changes, and social and job issues. It's not always possible to avoid stress, but it is possible to change your response to stress.

Common Symptoms of Stress

- Headache
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Change in sex drive
- Stomach upset
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression

Stress mimics addiction

Drugs and alcohol increase dopamine levels in the brain

Stress increases dopamine levels in the brain

In order to maintain an appropriate brain reward level we must monitor the level of stress

Addiction is a brain disease

The frontal cortex of the brain is where we consciously experience meaning, self, personality, love, morality, decency, responsibility, spirituality and willpower.

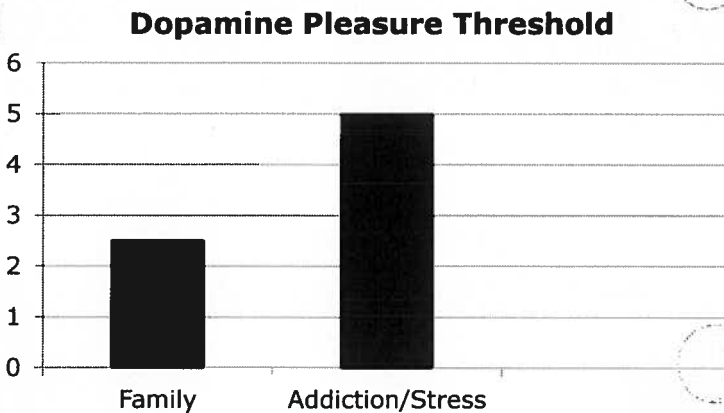
The midbrain does not operate with conscience. It acts immediately without planning or regard for long-term consequences. This is where our survival needs kick in.

Drugs work in the midbrain.

Reward Center of Brain

- Normal day brings happiness and pleasure
- Use of drugs and alcohol and other compulsive behaviors release dopamine
- Continued use raises the reward center balance line
- High stress hormone levels ALSO raise the reward center balance line
- The things that used to bring great pleasure no longer bring same happiness

Effect of Drugs/Stress



Back to the Mid-Brain

- **So now the pleasure threshold has been raised.**
- **Increased need for Dopamine**
- **Midbrain thinks it is dying**
- **Craving sets in – physiological response to the chemical deficiency**
- **Craving “hijacks” the frontal cortex**
- **During craving the frontal cortex gets shut off and taken over**

Midbrain Seeks Relief

- **Nothing is higher than survival**
- **No threat of jail, disbarment, divorce, bankruptcy will prevail during the craving.**
- **The use must occur to placate the mid-brain**
- **Once it is satisfied then the frontal cortex is allowed to step in again**

Stress Mimics Addiction

- **Chronic stress increases hormone corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF)**
- **Increased stress leads to pleasure deafness which means the person is no longer able to derive normal pleasure from those things that have been pleasurable in the past.**
- **So High stress hormone levels also reset the brain's pleasure "set point"**
- **Puts you at risk of addiction and often leads to a need for stress to feel normal**

How to Manage Stress

Although it's not always possible to avoid stress, there are ways to help minimize stress

- **Avoid controllable stressors**
- **Plan major lifestyle changes**
- **Realize your limitations**
 - **Prioritize**
 - **Improve communication**
 - **Share your thoughts**
- **Develop a positive attitude**
- **Reward yourself**

Additional Healthy Coping Skills

- Exercise and eat healthier
- Get Enough Sleep
- Carve out family and social engagement time
- Meaningful hobbies
- Community Service
- Get a massage
- Practice Mindfulness/Meditation
- Journal/Prayer/Spiritual Development

Resources:

- Report from the National Task Force on Lawyer Well Being, Creating a Movement to Improve Well Being in the Legal Profession, August 14, 2017
- Journal of Addiction Medicine, February 2016: The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys
- Dr. Nicole Labor, Associate Medical Director of Addiction Medicine, Summa Physicians Inc.
- <http://www.akronbar.org/member-center/committee-sections/lawyers-assistance-committee/>
- <http://www.ohiolap.org/>
- http://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance.html