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Oregon Attorney Assistance Program

# In Sight for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

Improving the Quality of Your Personal and Professional Life

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**Oregon Attorney Assistance Program**

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## HOW I BROKE THE CYCLE OF PAIN AND ADDICTION

I could start my story about my addiction to prescription drugs with the day I was fired from my job. Or I could begin with the day several months later when the clerk at the posh store where I was shopping called the police because she thought I was too impaired to drive. Or should I begin with the worst day – the day my husband told me if I didn't go to rehab, he would take my 12-year-old daughter and leave?

My addiction was fueled by physical pain and fear of pain. The event that sticks out in my mind as "the beginning" is struggling in pain through a client's daylong deposition. An MRI two days later showed I had a herniated cervical disk. Neurosurgeons recommended I get a fusion immediately due to spinal cord compression, but I waited for six months because of fear and uncertainty. The cloud of pain and anxiety that descended over me was ripe for addiction. I catastrophized – and started taking prescription Vicodin. At first I took it only occasionally, as needed, but soon it seemed like I needed it three times a day, every day, like clockwork.

The spinal fusion surgery I eventually underwent did not seem to stop the pain. The surgeon theorized that the injury had been there so long that a pain pathway had been established. Even though the offending disk was repaired, the tissues and nerves were still sending pain signals. The neurosurgeon referred me to a pain specialist.

My experience under the care of a "pain specialist" was the beginning of a nightmare roller-coaster ride. I became trapped in a web of prescriptions, appointments, and tests. I felt chained to the doctor and the pharmacy. The doctor put me on a permanent narcotics maintenance program. Soon I graduated from Vicodin to Percocet, and then to Morphine, Oxycontin, and Fentanyl. When I became depressed, they added an antidepressant. When I couldn't sleep, they added Ambien. Every morning I had to take an antinausea drug to keep it all down. The doctor told me I should accept that I would be on medications for the rest of my life. I felt I had two terrible choices – addiction or constant pain.

I kept trying to work, but I constantly felt sick, tired, and depressed. I imagined I had a giant raptor perched on my back, its claws embedded in my shoulder blades. Sometimes I shut the door for a few moments and lay on the floor, praying for the physical and emotional pain to go away. I was frequently late to work and used all my sick time. I became increasingly fragile, and I could not handle any criticism. I was deeply ashamed, and at the same time I blamed everyone else for my problems.

I tried to care for my 12-year-old daughter, my husband, and my 80-year-old mother, but I had nothing left for them. After work I would come home and lay on the couch. Usually, I would fall asleep there. My daughter didn't invite friends over for a year. I felt like an embarrassment to my family. I thought I was a terrible mother, wife, daughter, friend, and employee. I wanted to disappear.

*(Continued on page 2)*

At some point I started abusing the medications. I would take too much and run out before my prescription was due. Many months I made up excuses about why I needed to fill the prescriptions early. I would wait for the hour, the minute, my prescriptions could be filled, and would rush to the pharmacy to pick them up. The anxiety and shame created by dependence on narcotics were crippling.

One Saturday I woke up in the hospital. The doctor said I had overdosed and was down to three or four respirations per minute. That afternoon my husband called a treatment center and arranged for my 30-day in-patient admission. I did not want to go, but I had hit bottom. Of all the terrible choices I had, treatment seemed like the least horrible option.

Of course, the first few days of treatment were tough. The back pain initially increased, but not as much as I feared it would. I couldn't sleep for a few days, and the anxiety from withdrawal was very uncomfortable. But I was in the company of people going through the same thing, and that helped a lot. It also helped that I was free to collapse, cry, and sweat without fear of disappointing anyone. I no longer had to pretend everything was okay. It took a lot of energy to keep everything going when I was addicted to painkillers, but finally I could just stop and let all the balls in the air crash to the floor. There were a lot of things I disliked about treatment, but it saved my life, my family, and my career.

Within a couple of days, I was grateful that my husband had given me the ultimatum that forced me into treatment. At first, he held me at arm's length and did not promise that he would be there when I got out. My daughter also kept her distance. I was so sorry for all the pain I had caused them, but I tried to be hopeful they would trust me again.

I was placed in the chronic pain group, and we read a book that argued that pain and suffering are two separate things. Maybe you can't control the pain, but you can control your response to it. That concept was revolutionary to me. For the first time, I recognized that I was not actually trapped and that I did have choices. Instead of worrying that the pain was only going to get worse, I chose to think it would get better. This choice helped me break the cycle of pain – fear – pain – fear. When I assumed the pain was temporary, I was able to ignore it and think about something else. My shoulders relaxed, and the pain decreased. Within a couple

## Men's Work-Life Balance Workshop

If you find it challenging to achieve a healthy balance between work and the rest of your life, the OAAP is here to help. Our confidential men's workshop, "Practicing Law While Practicing Life," provides practical techniques for lawyers to use while exploring topics such as unhealthy stress; self-care; and balancing the demands of work, family, and friends.

This five-week workshop will meet at the OAAP from noon to 1:15 p.m. on Tuesdays, beginning in April 2015. The workshop facilitator will be OAAP Attorney Counselor Douglas S. Querin. There is no fee, but advance registration is required, as space is limited.

To participate in this workshop, please set up an appointment with Douglas S. Querin at 503-226-1057, ext. 12, or at douglasq@oaap.org.

## Finding Peace in Recovery OAAP Workshop

Managing conflict can be challenging for lawyers in recovery. Our confidential workshop, "Finding Peace in Recovery," is designed to help lawyers strengthen their recovery from substance misuse or other problematic behaviors by providing practical techniques to minimize unhealthy conflict in their personal and professional lives.

The workshop will be held at the OAAP office in Portland on consecutive Mondays from noon to 1:15 p.m. for five weeks, April 20–May 18, 2015. There is no fee, but advance registration is required, as space is limited. For additional information, contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I at 503-226-1057, ext. 12, or at douglasq@oaap.org.

of weeks, I could go for hours without thinking about pain. I began to apply this newfound power to choose my thoughts to other areas of my life. If I woke in the middle of the night, instead of darkness, I chose a more positive option from the thought menu. It was liberating to learn that I could choose what I spent my time thinking about.

Also key were the daily lectures about addiction and neurochemistry from scientists and doctors. I learned that drugs and alcohol alter the brain's neurochemistry and inhibit the body's natural ability to respond to pain and stress. I learned that if I could hold on long enough to get the chemicals out of my system, my own endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine would kick in. Eventually I found out that my own body handled pain as well as or better than narcotics had.

I accepted, and eventually embraced, the idea that in order to be healthy and sane, I had to completely eliminate narcotics and other addictive substances from my life. Instead of wondering if I am having too much, I simply have none. I followed the recommendations of my support group, and I tried to apply the principles in all my affairs. I also started making healthier choices in other areas of my life – I started jogging again and changed my diet.

Today I have been clean and sober for more than seven years. My life is so much easier to manage. I am responsible, organized, and reliable. If I say I am going to be somewhere or do something, I do it! I don't have to worry that I may feel too sick or that I will forget. I have my old job back, and I have regained the trust of my husband, daughter, friends, and coworkers. I am nearly pain-free, except for normal temporary aches and pains. I practice choosing how I respond to situations and people, and I try to take responsibility for my own emotions. Fortunately, the legal profession and life in general provide many opportunities to practice. Sometimes I do not succeed at first, but I keep trying and eventually I can steer my thoughts in a positive direction.

I regularly attend community support meetings to maintain my sobriety. I welcome the authenticity that I find in these meetings. People talk about real things in a genuine way. It is refreshing to connect with people in this way. It is comforting to know that anything I say or feel is acceptable and will be understood. And it is good to see newcomers, have the opportunity to share my experiences, and be grateful for how far I have come.

*Choosing Positive Thoughts*

## Alcohol Awareness Month

April is "Alcohol Awareness Month." April 2015 marks the 29th annual observance. This year's theme is "For the Health of It: Early Education on Alcoholism and Addiction."

If you think that you might have a drinking problem, or if you are concerned about someone else's drinking, call the OAAP at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227 and ask to speak to an OAAP attorney counselor.

## OAAP and OWLS Present the Eighth Annual Women's Wellness Retreat for Lawyers April 24-25, 2015



The OAAP and OWLS are pleased to offer the Eighth Annual Women's Wellness Retreat for Lawyers on Friday and Saturday, April 24-25, 2015. This year's theme is "Building Personal and Professional Relationships." Three MCLE Personal Management Assistance credits are being applied for.

A block of rooms is reserved for attendees at a special discounted room rate at The Resort at the Mountain, Welches, Oregon. The deadline to reserve rooms at the discounted rate is April 10, 2015. Reserve online at **http://bit.ly/1JI6KMo** using group code ORAA or call 503-622-2220.

To register for the retreat, download the registration form at **www.oaap.org**, or call the OAAP program assistant at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227, ext. 10. The deadline to register is Monday, April 20, 2015. For more information, contact Shari R. Gregory at ext. 14 or sharig@oaap.org.

# MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

*The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we give each other is our attention. . . A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.*
Rachel Naomi Remen

When we think of "first aid," we think of helping a person who has a physical injury – and having the knowledge to do so. First aid is a well-known process that has a wide range – from how to stop a small cut from bleeding to how to use a tourniquet. Most people have some knowledge about aiding people who have a physical injury. In fact, the term "first aid" has in some ways become a household name, and many people have first-aid kits in their homes and/or cars.

Recently, two Australians, Betty Kitchener and Anthony Jorm, took the concept of helping people with physical injury and applied it to helping people with mental health issues. They developed the concept of Mental Health First Aid. This is the natural next step for first aid, since mental health conditions are more common than heart disease, lung disease, and cancer combined. In the United States, more than half of adults will experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime.

Many people with mental health conditions either never seek help or delay seeking help. Individuals with mental health challenges frequently do not seek assistance for a variety of reasons, including the stigma still associated with mental conditions, lack of awareness that effective help is available, or lack of access to professional mental health services. Just as we might learn how to offer basic first aid for someone who is physically injured, we can learn the basic tools of Mental Health First Aid to help someone who is experiencing a mental health condition.

The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan for assisting someone who is experiencing mental health challenges consists of five steps:

1. Assess for the risk of suicide or harm (see box for general warning signs and recommendations for how to respond).
2. Listen nonjudgmentally.
3. Give reassurance and information.
4. Encourage appropriate professional help.
5. Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

**Listen nonjudgmentally.** People have a fundamental need to be understood – not agreed with, but understood.

- Listen respectfully and be supportive. Refrain from expressing any negative reactions you are having to the person's impairment or what they have done.
- Be patient, even if the person is not communicating well, is repetitive, or is speaking slowly or unclearly.
- Express genuine empathy whenever possible.
- Focus on listening and not directing, unless it is to prevent self-harm.

## 27th Annual Dinner for Lawyers and Judges in Recovery

Please join the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program on Friday, May 1, 2015, at the 27th Annual Dinner Celebrating Lawyers and Judges in Recovery at The Sentinel Hotel (formerly the Governor Hotel) in downtown Portland from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.

For a registration form or more information, call the OAAP at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227. The deadline to RSVP is Wednesday, April 29, 2015. Dinner is $40 per person.



**Show that you are listening attentively:**

- Paraphrase or repeat back what was said to you.
- Ask questions to clarify.
- Summarize facts and feelings.

**Give reassurance and information.** Once a person with a mental health problem feels that he or she has been heard, it becomes easier to offer encouragement and information. Reassurance includes emotional support, such as empathizing with how the person feels, and voicing hope. If you know of resources or have experiences that can help, discuss them with the person.

**Encourage appropriate professional help and other support strategies.** If the person who is experiencing a mental health crisis is not receiving professional help, encourage him or her to do so. Call the OAAP for resources and assistance. Also, encourage the person to seek the support of family, friends, and others. Peer supporters – others who have experienced mental health problems – can provide valuable help.

The OAAP is available for free and confidential assistance. If you know someone who is experiencing a mental health crisis, call 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-OAAP and ask to speak with an attorney counselor. They are here to help and provide resources.

*Adapted from Mental Health First Aid USA, Revised First Edition, Mental Health Association of Maryland, Missouri Department of Mental Health, and National Council for Behavioral Health (2013).*

## Assessing the Risk of Suicide

**General warning signs:**

- Thinking or talking about things that express feeling hopeless or a desire to die
- Behaviors suggestive of suicidal intent, such as looking for access to pills, weapons, or other means of killing oneself; increased use of alcohol or drugs; withdrawing or displaying dramatic mood changes

**Warning signs that demand immediate attention:**

- Threats to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Mentioning writing about suicide or death, especially when these actions are out of character for the person
- Obtaining or looking for ways to kill oneself
- Giving away prized possessions and other personal belongings, or putting affairs in order

**Recommended response:**

- Ask the person if he or she is having thoughts of suicide or is thinking about killing himself or herself. If he or she answers yes, you need to ask these three questions:

1. Have you decided how you would kill yourself?
2. Have you decided when you would do it?
3. Have you taken any steps to secure the things you would need to carry out your plan?

- Ask if he or she has been using alcohol or other drugs. Alcohol or drug use can make a person more susceptible to acting on impulse.
- Ask if he or she has made a suicide attempt in the past. A previous attempt increases the risk that a person will try again or will complete suicide.
- If possible, do not leave the person alone if he or she has a plan and a means to carry out the plan. If he or she has a plan, urge the individual to seek help by calling:

1. A doctor or therapist;
2. Emergency room or 911;
3. Someone from the person's support system, if possible;
4. The OAAP for resources; and/or
5. National Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (available 24 hours a day, every day).

*Adapted from Mental Health First Aid USA, Revised First Edition, Mental Health Association of Maryland, Missouri Department of Mental Health, and National Council for Behavioral Health (2013).*

## FIVE WAYS MINDFULNESS CAN BENEFIT LAWYERS

Mindfulness means being in the present and accepting each moment without preference or judgment. It's an ancient practice that comes from Buddhism. It's not a religious practice; rather, it's a way to engage in our lives with care and awareness.

The primary way to practice mindfulness is through meditation, where you sit quietly and settle your mind and body. It's interesting to note that every religion includes a practice of sitting silently, whether in meditation or in prayer.

So how can cultivating mindfulness benefit lawyers? Here are several ways.

**1. Reduced stress and anxiety.** Regularly practicing mindfulness allows you to be in the present moment. The less time you spend worrying about the future (which you can't control) or thinking about the past (which you can't change), the less stress and anxiety you'll experience.

**2. Response vs. reaction.** Most of us feel as if we're in a constant state of crisis, rushing from one urgent activity to the next. How often do you look up from your work to find it's already 3 p.m.? You've managed to put out some fires but haven't gotten to the really important work. With mindfulness, you'll learn to respond to situations, prioritizing your life so you can focus on what's really important.

**3. More happiness.** Mindfulness allows you to wake up to your life and "smell the roses." Research shows that with mindfulness we can raise our baseline of happiness by paying attention to the small details of life – a smile from a stranger or tying your child's shoelaces. Instead of having your mind ruminating over the next day's hearing, you can enjoy being at the dinner table with your spouse.

**4. More compassion.** Being a lawyer is hard work. We witness a lot of suffering, which can lead to vicarious trauma. Attorneys may try to shield themselves from this pain by disconnecting, but that isn't an effective strategy. A better way of coping, one that mindfulness enables, is to practice being compassionate – toward yourself for being in this difficult position and toward your client, who is experiencing pain.

**5. Better listening skills.** How often have you had the experience of talking with someone when you notice that you've checked out of the conversation? Or maybe you're so busy thinking of what you're going to say in response that you aren't really listening to the speaker? Mindfulness allows you to be in the moment so you can fully engage in the conversation and listen but, at the same time, tune in to your inner state.

### One-Minute Mindfulness Exercise

**1. Have a timer ready and find a comfortable seated position.** Make sure you're sitting upright, with shoulders back and both feet firmly on the ground.

**2. Set the timer for one minute.**

**3. Breathe in and out.** Simply pay attention to the sensation of the breath as it goes in and out. You'll soon notice that your attention has drifted away from the breath. When you notice this, come back to the breath. As you listen to your breathing, and flow with it, you will be in the present – the core of mindfulness.

Many people find it helpful to use a guided meditation. You can find a number of these online. You can also practice mindfulness while you're walking, checking e-mail, and at other points in your day. Consider increasing the time you devote to your mindfulness exercise as you become more skilled at the practice.

By Jeena Cho

*This article was previously printed on the author's website,* **http://theanxiouslawyer.com**. *Reprinted with permission.*

## Divorce Support

Beginning April 10, 2015, the OAAP will offer a support group in Portland for lawyers experiencing the challenges and issues of divorce. The 8-week group will meet at the OAAP on Fridays from noon to 1 p.m. To participate in this group, contact OAAP Attorney Counselor Shari R. Gregory, LCSW, JD, at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227, ext. 14, or email her at sharig@oaap.org, to set up a meeting.

# NAVIGATING FROM DIVORCE TO NEW BEGINNINGS

As lawyers, we are accustomed to solving problems in a logical progression. When faced with divorce, we are flooded with emotions. Emotions are not a problem we can solve. The divorce transition, like any transition, can be disorienting until we work through our grief and loss and then create new routines, fill in voids, add new activities, and create a healthy and fulfilling new phase of life.

Getting a divorce means changing family structures. Even if a person has come to the conclusion that a marriage is not working, it can be difficult to split up. The couple may rely on each other to fulfill emotional and practical roles and tasks within the household and family structure. Once a separation has occurred, people can find themselves disoriented by the void that is left after the breakup.

## Other Issues People Face in Divorce

- How to tell children and the impact on them
- How to tell others
- How to support your children
- Whether or not professional counselors are needed
- Choosing legal counsel and/or mediators/custody evaluators
- Dealing with financial issues
- Feeling an emotional void and looking for ways to fill it
- Increased need for practical coping strategies

## Grief and Loss: Death of a Dream

When people get married, they have a vision of what the relationship and future life together will be like. Usually couples envision living together forever, and often the vision also includes raising children together. When things start going wrong, the couple will hold onto the dream. To renew relationships, couples may try many things, like spending time together and/or apart, living separately, and going to workshops. When one of the spouses realizes that the marriage cannot be salvaged, the grieving process may be triggered. That dream of the future is fading.

## Feelings of Guilt and Failure

People often feel like they have failed if their marriages are not working. People may feel guilty for not trying hard enough, for their part in the breakup, and/or for not speaking up sooner about problems. They feel responsible for the relationship not working. Sometimes their guilt is about not leaving soon enough, or because the unhealthiness in the household has impacted the family.

## Resentments and Feelings of Betrayal

Working through resentments in the divorce process can be a worthwhile challenge that may or may not lead to forgiveness but usually leads to acceptance of what was. Often, people going through a divorce feel betrayed and angry, and processing these feelings can be helpful in moving on to a new healthy life.

## Adjustments to a New Life and Healing

The process of shaping a new life, listening to others, reading, processing emotions, and gaining insights will help you move along on a new path. Recognizing what wasn't working can help, as can discovering new ways to communicate. Learning to rely on yourself and others for support can lead you to find new friendships and to rekindle relationships with old friends and family you haven't seen in awhile. Adjusting to a new life can include finding new hobbies, better self-care, engaging in volunteer work, all of which can help people feel fulfilled and whole. They also have the opportunity to prioritize themselves and their wellness.

The OAAP offers a divorce support group to help people deal with emotions and the sometimes overwhelming tasks of reshaping your life, while working and often parenting, too. Through the support and wisdom of other participants, group assignments, and the guidance of the OAAP facilitator, group members work through their own divorce at their own pace. In the group, participants will have opportunities to process the death of a dream, guilt, failure, resentments, and adjusting to a new life.

The divorce support group provides participants the opportunity to learn from others as they learn from you, and also to learn you are not alone.

Shari R. Gregory, LCSW, JD

OAAP Assistant Director/Attorney Counselor

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Tanya Hanson, JD
*Editor*
503-639-7203

OAAP

Barbara S. Fishleder, JD, BBA
*OAAP Executive Director*
503-684-7425
barbaraf@oaap.org

## OAAP Attorney Counselors

Shari R. Gregory, LCSW, JD
OAAP *Assistant Director*
sharig@oaap.org

Kyra M. Hazilla, JD, MSW
kyrah@oaap.org

Mike Long, JD, MSW, CEAP
mikel@oaap.org

Douglas S. Querin, JD, LPC, CADC I
douglasq@oaap.org

1-800-321-OAAP
503-226-1057
**www.oaap.org**

# LAWYERS IN TRANSITION CALENDAR

Lawyers in Transition is a networking, educational, and support group for lawyers and judges making job or career transitions. The group meets on Thursdays at noon in the OAAP offices at **520 SW Yamhill, Suite 1050, Portland.** If you are interested in attending, please contact Kyra M. Hazilla, 503-226-1057, ext. 13, or Mike Long, ext. 11. A guest speaker for Lawyers in Transition is featured on the first Thursday of each month. These meetings are open for anyone to attend. See the calendar below for scheduled speakers.

The OAAP also occasionally presents career workshops to assist lawyers, judges, and law students in identifying satisfying job and career opportunities. These workshops typically meet one evening per week from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. for six consecutive weeks. If you would like additional information about the OAAP career workshops, call Kyra M. Hazilla or Mike Long at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227.

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| **April 2, 2015** | **Stan Austin** | **Law firm partner to in-house counsel at Moda Health** |
| **May 7, 2015** | **Dan Esterling** | **Americorps to legal services account manager to private practice to portfolio manager at HUD** |
| **June 4, 2015** | **Amy Miller** | **Public defense to parenting/solo practice to program management** |
| **July & August 2015** | | **Summer Break** |

**For current information on upcoming Lawyers in Transition speakers and topics, please visit the OAAP website at www.oaap.org and click on CLEs/Workshops.**