

2015 Annual Convention

Best Practices for Busy Attorneys: Dealing with Stress and Depression

Solo, Small Firm, and General Practice Section
Ohio Bar Liability Insurance Company
Young Lawyers Section

1.0 Professional Conduct Hour/1.0 NLT Hour



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Speaker Biographies

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Executive Director

Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program

Columbus, Ohio

Mr. Mote received his BA from Wright State University, his MA from the University of Dayton, and his JD from Capital University Law School. His professional memberships include the American Bar Association (Health Law Section; Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar Section), Ohio State Bar Association (Council of Delegates, District 7; Estate Planning, Trust, and Probate Law Section; Lawyers Assistance Committee), Columbus Bar Association (Admissions Committee; Probate Committee), The Florida Bar (Out-of-State Practitioners Division), Ohio State Bar Foundation, Columbus Bar Foundation, Central Ohio Association for Justice, Central Ohio Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and the Federalist Society. Mr. Mote is the Executive Director of the Ohio Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc., which was formed by the Lawyers Assistance Committee of the Ohio State Bar Association. Before making OLAP a full-time endeavor, Mr. Mote was a general practice lawyer and civil litigator for over 25 years. He was presented with the 2005 Award of Merit for service to the profession by the Columbus Bar Association, the 2006 Ohio Bar Medal by the Ohio State Bar Association, and in May 2010, OSBA presented him with the Eugene R. Weir Award for Ethics and Professionalism. Mr. Mote can be contacted via phone at 800-348-4343; fax at 614-586-0633; e-mail at smote@ohiolap.org. For additional information, please visit www.ohiolap.org.

Dealing with Stress and Depression

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Dealing with Stress and Depression

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I. What Is 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.

A. Symptoms of stress.

Stress affects the body, as well as thoughts and emotions. Below are some 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

B. How to manage stress.

Although it's not always possible to avoid stress, there are ways to help minimize stress. If you recognize signs of stress, the best way to manage and alleviate stress is to develop coping strategies. Some coping strategies include:

- Avoid controllable stressors
- Plan major lifestyle changes
- Realize your limitations
- Prioritize
- Improve communication
- Share your thoughts
- Develop a positive attitude
- Reward yourself
- Eat and sleep well
- Exercise

C. How stress affects lawyers.

Stress affects all people and all professions. Stress in the legal profession, however, is well-documented. Lawyers often have demanding schedules and heavy workloads, which may contribute to increased stress levels.

II. What Is Depression?

Depression is the most common mental health concern, affecting 10 percent of the general population, and one-third of lawyers. Although everyone feels down or blue at some point, depression is different. It occurs when those feelings last longer than two weeks. Depression interferes with daily life and normal functioning. No one is immune from depression, although women are diagnosed with depression more often than men. The good news is that depression is treatable, and resources exist to help individuals experiencing depression.

A. Symptoms of depression.

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" feelings
- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and/or helplessness
- Irritability or restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, and making decisions
- Insomnia, early morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems that do not ease even with treatment

B. Treatment of depression.

Depression is treatable. A doctor or other mental health professional will determine the most appropriate form of treatment, which may include psychotherapy (talk therapy) or medication. Treatment is most effective when sought early, but the vast majority of individuals, even those with severe depression, benefit from treatment.

C. How depression affects lawyers.

Lawyers experience depression at higher rates than the general population. While there's no way to determine exactly why this occurs, demanding schedules and other stresses inherent in the practice of law contribute to higher rates of depression.

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