

Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program

Substance abuse assistance for health service professionals licensed, certified or registered by the State of Nebraska

Understanding Health Service Professionals Who Choose To Use and Lose

Many times during the NE LAP's discussions with others who know or work with an addicted health service professional, we will hear the comment "I don't understand why they did this." They may be speaking about a doctor who lost his reputation, practice or license due to a drug addiction. It may be about a nurse who lost her job due to a third DUI. It may be a licensee who was already on State license probation and tested positive for their drug of choice and now the State may have to revoke their license to practice.

These are typical cases. Their spouses, colleagues or even treatment providers cannot understand why, when the stakes were so high for the professional and he or she knew that they would lose so much if they used drugs or alcohol, the professional would choose to use and lose so much. It just does not make sense to non-addicts. It is just unfathomable that any health professional would choose "to feel good or feel better" over so many important things in their life.

At NE LAP, we believe it is a good thing when you do not understand the choices an addict makes because it means you are not an addict or have not been an addict yourself. It is a positive reflection of your situation that you do not understand the addict. You can be grateful you do not understand.

Addicts, however, can understand each other and their addictive personalities. They can understand the compulsions or the cravings that cause addicts to use despite the high personal and professional risks that come with using. This is one of the reasons 12-step programs, such as AA and NA, work so well. Fellow recovering addicts can provide a shared understanding of addiction and the difficult steps that must be taken to arrest the addiction. Recovered alcoholics and drug addicts often make great substance abuse counselors due to their understanding of, and desire to help, other addicts.

However, you do not need to be an addict yourself to have an adequate understanding of addiction. There is an amazing amount of educational information available in books, articles or on the internet about addiction. There are self-help groups, such as Al-Anon, for guidance and support for those whose lives are impacted by the alcoholic or drug addicted health service professional. One can also seek out the substance abuse services of your local substance abuse agency or the NE LAP for professional assistance.

As for not understanding the compulsion of addiction when the stakes are high, that is what addiction is. Addiction is the continuing use of alcohol or drugs despite the increasing destructiveness of the use. If, like most of us, you have a little compulsion of your own, such as M & M's, other foods, romance novels, golf, the Soaps, or some other pleasure, and you choose to use when you really know you should not. You can recognize the feelings of compulsion that can be a powerful and overwhelming force for the alcohol or drug addicted health service professional.

If you are a licensed health service professional or an employer wanting more information about substance abuse or addiction recovery or other related issues, please contact the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our website at www.lapne.org. If you know of or are concerned about a colleague's alcohol/drug abuse, contact the NE LAP for appropriate intervention and ongoing support. You may be saving a life, a family or a career.