

## **ENABLING ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE**

Health service professionals devote their lives to helping people and often have difficulty accepting it when they need help themselves. Health service professionals are more susceptible to alcohol and drug addiction than the general population. Many perceive medication as the only appropriate care for their ills, including emotional or physical pain. Some have easy access to a supply of prescription medications. Also, some have extensive knowledge of drugs and feel they can prevent addiction because they can control their use of the drug.

Alcohol and drug abuse has been and continues to be an important factor to consider in the practice problems of health service professionals. Professionals who abuse typically have problems with attendance, personal appearance, relationships at work, practice competency and even safety issues. The substance abuser does not check their substance abuse problems at the door and others are adversely impacted. This has a negative impact on their confidence in their colleague and it can be destructive to the morale of the work group.

The best way for those dealing with a colleague with a substance abuse problem is to not ignore it or cover up the conduct or problems that result from the abuse or addiction. Ignoring or covering up for an abuser is called enabling. Examples of enabling in the workplace would be repeatedly offering to take on more than one's fair share of the work because a colleague is "going through a rough time," feeling sympathy, instead of empathy, for the colleague and frequently covering up for them, or rationalizing that it is not that big of a deal when a colleague regularly comes in late and has hangovers or smells like alcohol. Patterns of enabling by one or more co-workers generally indicates a pattern of alcohol or drug abuse by a colleague.

Many health service professionals do not receive the appropriate intervention and treatment they need due to lack of their colleagues encouragement to seek assistance on their confrontation of them when the problems are obvious. Some common warning signs that alcohol and drug abuse may be present in your workplace:

Unsatisfactory work/chart performance	Disorganized schedule
Unreasonable behavior	Unexplained absences
Frequent absences or illness	Excessive ordering of drug supply
Decreased workload	Inaccessibility to patients and staff
Defensive if questioned/confronted	Alcohol on breath
Discrepancies in treatment orders, progress notes, medication records	Frequent incorrect medication/narcotic count

Enabling the substance abuser is easy. Confronting them is hard because there are usually difficult issues to be faced. However, there is a greater good that will be achieved when the abuser overcomes their alcohol or drug abuse – for themselves, their families, those they serve and their colleagues.

If you have further questions about the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program, or feel that you may benefit from assistance from the NE LAP, please contact the NE LAP Coordinator, Judi Leibrock or NE LAP Counselor Tricia Veech, at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055.