

## Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program

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

### Diagnosis Denial

Health service professionals who abuse alcohol or drugs often use denial to cover up or minimize the abuse. They may deny any use. Once found to be using, they often deny their use is a problem. When it is established that they are abusing, they will generally deny they have any compulsion or chronic need for, or addiction to, the alcohol or drugs.

Professionals who have the symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse or dependency and deny the real nature and extent of their problems are in *diagnosis denial*. They rationalize the use is not that extensive or the problems caused by the use are not that severe. Alcoholism and drug addiction are progressive illnesses and eventually the symptoms of abuse become so severe the diagnosis can no longer be denied. The criteria for alcohol or drug dependence diagnosis have been met according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorder-IV (DSM-IV). Subsequently, the diagnosis and recommendations for treatment are made for the professional by NE LAP.

Another type of *diagnosis denial* often occurs after a period of time has elapsed since a dependence diagnosis was established. The professional will use the passage of time to rationalize that there never was a problem in the first place, despite the prior alcohol/drug related problems and diagnosis. They will use the absence of additional abuse problems since the diagnosis to rationalize they are really not dependent since there have been no recent outstanding problems. They will also claim they have changed over time and rationalize that now they can appropriately control their use of alcohol or drugs.

This type of *diagnosis denial* of a prior diagnosis is a particularly dangerous type of denial. The road of the use of alcohol and drugs is overwhelmingly littered with the life wrecks of those who denied their lifelong dependence on alcohol or drugs. Based on these historical, hard earned experiences of alcoholics and drug addicts and those who treat them, we know alcohol and drug dependence is “a chronic relapsing disorder.” \* Alcoholics and drug addicts who use again will abuse again and continued use will lead down the progressive path of the disorder to even more severe symptoms and consequences than occurred previously.

NE LAP alcohol/drug assessments include a research of the prior use history of the licensee. In cases where there was a prior diagnosis of alcohol/drug dependence, the licensee may deny the prior diagnosis but we know the licensee’s illness requires long-term, total abstinence from alcohol/drugs. Licensees who have not achieved and maintained abstinence will be recommended to return to either intensive outpatient treatment or relapse treatment and 12-step recovery activities. These recommendations, once completed, will give the licensee another opportunity to arrest the illness of alcoholism or drug addiction once and for all.

\*DSM-IV-R, p. 363

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](http://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.