

# NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A SERVICE OF BEST CARE EAP

## DENIAL

Health care professionals who abuse alcohol or use drugs or other substances often use denial to cover up or minimize their use. They may even deny they are using anything at all. Once discovered they are using, they often deny their use is a problem. They will generally deny they have any compulsion or chronic need for, or addiction to, alcohol, the drug or other substance.

Professionals who have the symptoms of alcohol or substance use disorders and deny the real nature and extent of their problems are in denial. They rationalize the use is not that extensive or the problems caused by their use are not that severe. They also rationalize that their use only affects them, no one else. Alcohol and substance use disorders are progressive illnesses and eventually the symptoms become so severe that a diagnosis can no longer be denied. The health care professional that seeks an alcohol/substance use assessment from the NE LAP will be assessed based on the diagnostic criteria for an alcohol or substance use disorder as defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*. The NE LAP will then make education, counseling or treatment recommendations for the professional.

Another type of denial often occurs after a period of time has elapsed since a moderate or severe alcohol or substance use disorder diagnosis has been established. The professional will use the passage of time to rationalize that there never was an alcohol or substance use disorder in the first place, despite the prior alcohol or substance-related problems and diagnosis. They will use the absence of any additional problems since the diagnosis to rationalize they did not have a substance use disorder because there have been no recent outstanding problems. They will also claim they have changed over time and rationalize that they can now appropriately control their use of alcohol or other substances.

This type of denial of a prior diagnosis of a moderate or severe alcohol or substance use disorder is a particularly dangerous type of denial. The road of alcohol and substance use is overwhelmingly littered with the life wrecks of those who denied their lifelong alcohol or substance use disorder. Based on these historical, hard earned experiences of those with a moderate or severe alcohol or substance use disorder, and those who have treated them, we know alcohol and substance use disorders are chronic relapsing disorders. Health care professionals who use again will likely be led down a progressive path of the disorder and will continue to use alcohol or other substances causing more severe symptoms and consequences than may have previously occurred.

The NE LAP alcohol/substance use assessments include the health care professional's prior alcohol and substance use history. In cases where there was a prior moderate or severe substance use disorder (or prior dependency diagnosis as defined in the previous addition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revised (DSM-IV-TR)*), the professional may deny the prior diagnosis. However, we know the professional's alcohol or substance use illness requires long-term, total abstinence from alcohol and other substances. Health care professionals who have not achieved and maintained abstinence will likely be recommended to return to either intensive outpatient treatment or attend relapse prevention treatment and self-help recovery meetings, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, SMART Recovery or Celebrate Recovery. The recommendations, once completed, will give the health care professional another opportunity to arrest the illness of an alcohol or substance use disorder once and for all.

*If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about sobriety and recovery, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our web site at [www.lapne.org](http://www.lapne.org). If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Coordinator.*

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