



FROM THE DRI FOUNDATION

Lawyer Mental Health – It’s a Priority!

By Cate Dugan

The American Lawyer [reported earlier this year](#) that its survey of nearly 3,000 lawyers showed over 70% of those practicing attorneys reported suffering from anxiety, an increase from 2022 reports. Just under 40% reported dealing with depression, a 35% increase over last year. And in general, the number of lawyers reporting struggles with mental health doubled over 2022 reports. Even more concerning, a study conducted of over 2,000 attorneys in California and Washington, D.C. in early 2023, which was recently published in the journal *Healthcare*, [concluded that](#) attorneys are twice as likely as other working US adults to have suicidal thoughts. High stress and “high work overcommitment,” not surprisingly, being the biggest predictor of suicidal ideations.

The pressures on attorneys can certainly mount. Billable hour pressures, inability to disconnect, lack of sleep, client expectations, substance abuse – all play their part in the increasing stress levels and health concerns for our colleagues. However, the same survey from *The American Lawyer* shows that only about 1/3 of attorneys polled would feel comfortable seeking help or taking time away from work to address their mental health or substance abuse issues.

Thankfully, as a profession in the past few years, we can see a turn in the tide of practitioners and law firms addressing lawyer mental health issues head on. Many states require mandatory CLE hours each year on well-being topics. Large law firms, as well as legal organizations such as the ABA, have well-being committees. Here at DRI, the [DRI Foundation](#) and, within the Foundation, the [DRI for Life Committee](#), are committed to providing resources to our members to emphasize work/life balance, career satisfaction, mental health, addiction resources and tools for living a healthier life.

Maintaining healthy boundaries is an often-cited tip for increasing lawyer well-being. While technology may make it possible to be available to our clients 24/7, taking time away from work and even just daily time away from your phone or computer are important boundaries to protect health and well-being. Daily movement, in whatever format you prefer, is also statistically proven to increase positive moods and help manage stress. Also, taking advantage of employee or lawyer well-being programs is another great tip – if your firm or any organization you are involved in offers any opportunities for wellness initiatives, group physical activity, wellness apps, gym memberships, attorney well-being CLEs or programming, these are excellent ways to ensure we as attorneys are being proactive about our own mental health.

Finally, as a profession, I would encourage each of us to pay attention to our friends and colleagues and their mental wellness whenever possible. Social isolation or loneliness, which contributes to depression and other mental health issues, have been noted as common among lawyers due to the demanding and adversarial nature of the job. Connecting with colleagues through membership in organizations, regular collaboration or social interactions in a work environment, and just opportunities to socialize with our friends and colleagues in this profession can contribute to a sense of belonging. Reach out to a colleague – invite them to lunch, invite them to a [DRI seminar](#), or just check in.

Protecting attorney wellness and increasing our awareness of these issues is a priority for the DRI Foundation. If you have suggestions or ideas about attorney well-being resources, speakers, or programming that could be implemented through the DRI Foundation, we would love to hear from you!



Cate Dugan is a Partner at Peterson White LLP. She is the DRI Cares Chair.