

CHICAGO LAWYER®

CLIFFORD'S NOTES

Starting this year, Illinois lawyers will be required to attend a one-hour class on mental health and substance abuse, as well as an hour class on diversity and inclusion. The classes' purpose is to successfully complete their mandatory Continuing Legal Education requirements. Illinois is among the first states in the nation to require these courses, demonstrating a real concern for the health of individual lawyers and the profession.

In an effort to promote the awareness of these important goals, Clifford Law Offices is sponsoring a free two-hour webinar Feb. 21 that addresses both of these requirements. At this writing, more than 1,000 lawyers already have registered to attend. The first hour features an all-star panel with a cross section of speakers who will speak on wellness and balance in a lawyer's life.

One need look no further than the letter to the editor that appeared in a recent issue of *American Lawyer* magazine written by the widow of a 42-year-old partner at a major law firm who committed suicide. What signs were missed? What would lead someone to commit such a drastic act the day before his tenth wedding anniversary? The widow asks some poignant and sad questions. ("Big Law Killed My Husband": An Open Letter From a Sidley Partner's Widow," Joanna Litt, Nov. 12, 2018.)

The issue has been studied in recent years, including by The Chicago Bar Association's 2018 "The Future of the Practice of Law in Chicago," which resulted in a 65-page report on how lawyers can improve their efficiency, output and worklife.

Assistant Dean James Faught, slated as a speaker at the Feb. 21 seminar, sat with 50 diverse leaders of the profession with his focus on the wellness of law students and young lawyers on the CBA study. That subcommittee's findings concluded that "wellness is a critical topic that has been overlooked by generations of lawyers." It's obvious that is no longer the case.

The subcommittee went on to say, "Our profession is suffering. Alcohol abuse, drug dependency, gambling addiction, depression and mental health problems affect lawyers in disproportionate numbers. These issues affect our law students and new lawyers more than most of us ever imagined and affect our more experienced colleagues in ways that can threaten our clients' cases, our licenses to practice law and our families."

The CBA report called the new CLE rules "a good first step," but wrote that "more is needed for law students and new lawyers who are all too familiar with a stressful legal culture that offers



FINDING A BALANCE

A free upcoming CLE tackles wellness and diversity

By **BOB CLIFFORD**

alcohol at most social events. As we look ahead, these challenges will only increase."

Other panelists who will address this critical issue Feb. 21 include Lawyers Assistance Program Executive Director Robin Belleau, American Bar Association Director of the Center for Professional Responsibility Tracy Kepler and E. Kenneth Wright, presiding judge of the Cook County Circuit Court's Municipal Division and chair of the Illinois State Bar Association's Wellness Committee.

The second hour will deal with diversity and inclusion. It will include Cook County Circuit Judge Thomas More Donnelly, chair of the Illinois Judicial College Board of Trustees, the educational arm of the Illinois Supreme Court; Josie M. Gough, Loyola University School of Law director of experiential learning and member of its diversity council; Cunyon Gordon, senior counsel and director of the Settlement Assistance Program for the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights; and Allison Wood, principal of legal ethics consulting and former hearing board chair and litigation counsel with the Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission.

The ISBA also conducted an exhaustive study that was released in 2016 by the Task Force on the Future of Legal Services. Although this report focused on the impact of technology on legal services, it cannot be ignored that it is the faster pace in today's business world that is driving client ex-

pectations as well as lawyers' gloomier outlook on the profession and their wellness.

And the ABA reported in a Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation study that it conducted along with the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance programs that 19 percent of lawyers experience anxiety and 23 percent experience chronic stress. Its 2017 report on the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, "The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practice Recommendations for Positive Change," found that "the gathering of stakeholders is a first step."

It will take a village to help lawyers as they attempt to succeed in the 21st century when many cannot be away from their technology devices for less than a few minutes. Millennials seem to desire a greater balance of work and personal life, a foreign concept to many including the baby boomers who have been practicing for decades. Maybe we can all learn something from the younger folks.

P.S. And I should mention that the Feb. 21 program includes a five-minute tutorial on chair yoga. Don't knock it until you've tried it! [CL](#)

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