

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A SERVICE OF BEST CARE EAP

Oh, The Woven Web of Addiction!

One of the four primary characteristics of the web of alcohol or drug addiction is denial. Denial is a defense mechanism or process addicts use to release themselves from the destructive consequences of addiction. Denial is doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result. Denial can also be manifested by those involved with the addicted professional. This enables the addict and may hinder them from getting the professional treatment they need. The addicted healthcare professional will be defensive when confronted and may respond with “I am still coming to work every day, so I must not have a problem,” denying the evidence to the contrary. They may project their problems on others. Many times, the addicted healthcare professional cannot see the connection between the drinking or drug use and their life spiraling downward. Denial can impair judgment and can result in self-delusion for the addicted healthcare professional.

Denial of an alcohol or drug problem weaves itself into the second primary characteristic of addiction, loss of control. The addicted healthcare professional is no longer able to predict when they will stop, how much they will consume, how long they will drink or use, or how they will behave once alcohol or drug use has been initiated. The professional likely has had many unsuccessful attempts to cut down or quit using drugs. Their addiction may escalate to diverting drugs from their employer, forging prescriptions, or taking patient’s unused medications. If alcohol is the drug of choice, professionals may come to work with the smell of alcohol on their breath, or may be “on call” and report to work under the influence when called in. The addicted professional is often using alcohol or drugs by this point for pain relief or to medicate feelings. There will usually be loss of control in other areas of the professional’s life as the addiction progresses.

As the web of addiction continues to grow for healthcare professionals, preoccupation with obtaining alcohol or drugs develops. This is the third primary characteristic of an addiction. The addict’s need to use or drink leads to development of elaborate plans for accessing alcohol or drugs, and when and where the substances will be used. This preoccupation can be a detriment to everything else in the addict’s life. The addict cannot stop drinking or using drugs regardless of the risks they are taking or the negative consequences of continued use.

The final primary characteristic in the web of addiction is continued use of alcohol or drugs despite negative consequences. The addiction has complete control over their actions at this point. There may be adverse consequences to their family, broken relationships, legal problems, work and licensure problems, or colleague complaints. At this point a referral should be made to the NE LAP to assess the professional’s treatment needs.

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. If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Judi Leibrock, NE LAP Coordinator, or Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Counselor.

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