

## PRACTICING ALONGSIDE DEPRESSION

As a civil trial attorney, I have been fortunate to have over the last several years an amazingly skillful, hardworking and successful law partner. It just so happens that this partner suffers from severe clinical depression. This psychological illness not only impacts my partner's personal life, but also directly affects his professional practice. By courageously dealing with his depression, I am pleased to say that my partner has actually enhanced his professional practice and magnified his positive contribution to our law firm. Over the years we have been able to effectively grow our law practice while assisting our partner on his steady path toward psychological wellness in a very stressful and competitive profession.

We have been able to achieve this success through cultivating social and emotional supports for our partner, while developing appropriate strategies to overcome the inevitable obstacles posed by his illness. Necessary support is offered both socially and emotionally, and manifests itself in many ways. Emotional support has been extended to our depressed partner through a willingness to discuss the frequent struggles and stressors accompanying our partner's illness.

Building a supportive environment entails an open dialogue and communication regarding the illness of depression and its specific manifestations, including the effects of prescribed medications. Accommodating and encouraging ongoing psychological treatment and psychotherapy is another essential element of this supportive environment. Active social engagement is also an important support structure. For instance, frequent and regular lunch meetings out of the office have proven very restorative for our depressed partner.

Developing strategies to help our partner successfully deal with his illness focuses on reducing and tempering the considerable stressors that accompany the adversarial civil litigation process. The implementation of flexible work and trial schedules, the intentional and thoughtful staffing of trial teams and out of town work assignments all take into consideration the needs and concerns accompanying our partner's depression illness. Additionally, regular and frequent planning and scheduling meetings are an essential strategic component. Special care has to be given that case and work loads and trial assignments are fairly distributed and shared evenly throughout the firm, even though special consideration is given to our ill partner's needs and requirements.

Overcoming the inevitable obstacles posed by our partner's clinical depression can only be achieved through this cultivation of social and emotional support and the intentional development and implementation of specific coping strategies. The illness cannot be simply ignored or kept in the closet. Care and concern combined with purposeful action are absolutely essential to the continued health and well being of our partner and the positive advancement of our law firm. The steady growth of our law practice and the continued effectiveness and wellness of our partner are a testament that clinical depression can be successfully managed within a vibrant civil litigation practice through proper support and purposeful strategic planning.