

# Balancing Life & Law

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## **LESA Refresher Course 2007 – Wills, Estates & Elder Law – May 5-9, 2007**

*A lack of balance may contribute to personal distress or personal distress may contribute to imbalance – either way – without personal wellness, balance is impossible. Issues of Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Addiction are hi-lited.*

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*Assist is an independent, not-for-profit Society that provides confidential help to lawyers, articling students and their immediate families experiencing personal difficulties.*

### **Balancing Life & Law – What does it mean?**

Often this discussion seems to come down to the narrow discussion of hours – more is bad, less is good goes the theory. The wider discussions that include other work related factors such as money, choice of practice area, ego, technology, employers perspective and the like are more valuable.<sup>1</sup> Those discussions that also include the even broader discussions of the mind, body and spirit of the individual along with the critical relationships of family and friends are even more valuable yet. All of these factors can lead us to a very complex discussion of a simple question.

I simplify the topic for myself by embracing two personal opinions:

- There is no one objective standard that can be considered “balance”. Balance is largely a subjective state of being.
- Personal wellness is the overriding factor in any discussion of balance.

There can be no balance for me if I am not healthy. How many hours I’m working, my productivity, the state of my relationships with my spouse and kids, the amount of money I make, my happiness at the office and at home, my inner sense of fulfillment and well-being and anything else that might contribute to being in or out of balance all depend upon the state of my physical, mental and emotional health.

Certainly too many hours, too much stress and how all of the other balance issues are playing out affects my health. The reverse is also true – if I'm feeling well, I'm able to cope with that stressful work situation or the difficult family or personal issue. Either way, it's important to be aware of our own personal wellness, to recognize when things are not going well and to take action when our physical, mental, emotional or spiritual health is suffering.

There are a great many personal challenges all of us may face. As lawyers there are some that we may be at even greater risk for than most, including: Stress, depression, anxiety and addictions.

It's helpful to know what each of these potentially devastating conditions may look and feel like, how each can affect our health and how we might deal with each should we be facing these challenges.

### **Stress / Depression / Anxiety / Addiction:**

Did you know?

The Mood Disorder Society of Canada estimates that during their lifetime, about 5-12 percent of men and 10-25 percent of women will have at least one episode of major depressive disorder.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian Mental Health Association cites anxiety disorders as the most common mental health disorder, affecting approximately 10% of all people.<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse reports that 13.6% of all Canadians are considered high-risk drinkers and that a 2004 survey indicated that 14.1% of Canadians reported cannabis use and 3% reported illicit drug use (including cocaine) other than cannabis in the previous 12 month period.<sup>4</sup>

Statistics Canada has estimated that 4.5% of Albertans aged 15 or older are dependent on either alcohol or illicit drugs.<sup>5</sup>

The Centre for Suicide Prevention reports that suicide rates in Alberta are approximately 14-15 deaths annually by suicide per 100,000 people.<sup>6</sup>