

THE DAILY RECORD

MCBA workshop focuses on self-care, wellness

By: tombaden February 1, 2016 0



Kim Duguay, chair of the MCBA Health and Well-Being Programming Committee, talked about cooking classes and a night of laughter at upcoming committee events. (NORA A. JONES)

Monroe County Bar Association Health and Well-Being Programming Committee Chair Kim Duguay introduced the speakers for the Jan. 29 wellness skills workshop, a lunch-time program offered free of charge, complete with lunch, goodie bags, and in class exercises.

The owners of Tree of Hope Counseling presented simple tactics for building personal awareness of stress, becoming aware of the sources of stress, and self-care techniques to avoid compassion fatigue.

Background and resources

While Steve Modica was Monroe County Bar President, he appointed Brad Kammholz and Cheryl Heller to lead a task force to develop a

program focused on attorney health and well-being.

The recommendations from that committee suggested a three-pronged approach focused on: (1) resources for those who recognize they need help; (2) educational programs about ways to monitor and deal with stress; and (3) a diversion program connected to the appellate division's grievance procedures.

The recent wellness workshop was the second educational program offered, and also provided the opportunity to introduce Tree of Hope Counseling as a resource available to attorneys with complete anonymity.

Tree of Hope maintains a dedicated telephone number where attorneys who are faced with mental health concerns and/or significant stress can receive preliminary assistance and follow up with specialists matched to the type of problems described in the initial telephone screening. The MCBA has signed a contract with Tree of Hope Counseling to provide confidential mental health related services to attorneys in our region.

"You don't have to belong to the bar association to use the services," stated Brad Kammoltz, assuring everyone that anonymity is guaranteed, even though the MCBA will pay for the services used with grant money received from the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar.

This service supplements the existing MCBA Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers and SOLACE programs, chaired by Terry Emmens and Paul LeClair respectively.

Wellness workshop

The owners of Tree of Hope Counseling, Kara Juszczak, LCSW and Pete Navratil, LCSW-R introduced terms like compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

"Compassion fatigue is defined as a state of exhaustion or distress resulting from prolonged exposure to someone else's struggles," Juszczak explained. "Attorneys work in this environment every day."

Vicarious trauma describes the situation when the person in the helper role starts to suffer stress symptoms related to the victim/client's trauma, often manifesting as inability to sleep or depression.

“Institutional trauma,” Navratil stated, “describes the effects on the practitioner from overwhelming demands and expectations from supervisors, regulatory systems, funders, and other external systems that are inflexible or nonresponsive.”

Awareness is key

Workshop participants were guided through a self-assessment exercise to gauge where they might fall on the “compassion satisfaction scale” or the “burnout scale.” Additional questions measured “secondary traumatic stress.”

Just getting a sense of being in the high burnout range and low satisfaction range can be enough to wake you to the fact something needs to change, they explained.

Relaxation techniques, including breathing exercises, were recommended along with applying some self-care skills including: 1) try something new; 2) reconnect with what's important; 3) be aware of what's causing stress; 4) be creative.

“We can only control our responses to our environment and manage ourselves,” Juszczak said.

Tree of Hope counseling

Tree of Hope is a collaborative network of private practitioners offering individual, group and family therapy, psychiatry, training, education and consultation. There are over 20 practitioners in the network, all committed to offering accessible, specialized and personalized treatment and services focused on wellness and recovery.

The phone number for attorneys is 585-353-1541. The initial phone consultation allows Tree of Hope to gather information to recommend the best therapist, who will see you within a week. The first therapist visit and three additional visits will be paid by the MCBA.

Diversion program

The third prong of the task force recommendation is connected to how problems often present themselves. Unfortunately, grievances filed against attorneys often materialize when the attorney is not at his/her mental best.

Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Frazee is leading a committee that is building a diversion program that will provide better alternatives for attorneys facing disciplinary issues.

Copyright © 2016 The Daily Record 16 W. Main Street, Rochester, NY 14614 (585) 232-6920

