

## **The Alabama Lawyers' Assistance Program at Work: *The Why and How of ALAP***

The lawyer gets the call just before noon, as he's arranging lunch with his wife at a nice restaurant downtown. His secretary says: "It's Joe Anybody and he says it's an emergency". The lawyer is a volunteer on the Alabama Lawyers' Assistance Programs' Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. He is also a member of one or more recovery communities and has himself been that "emergency" at some point in his life. He knows that minutes and hours are precious in the life threatening battle with addiction, depression and other mental illness. When a fellow lawyer finally reaches out action must be swift.

The volunteers' wife understands when she hears the familiar words: "I have to cancel honey, I'll be home when I can. I love you".

The volunteer arrives at the law offices of *You, Anybody and Me* within an hour of the call. He is taken to a small kitchen in the rear of the office and introduced to a young associate. The associate is unshaven, disheveled and belligerent as the volunteer reaches out his hand. Clearly the associate is in acute distress.

More than an hour passes as the volunteer and the associate exchange experiences and develop rapport. The volunteer empathetically conveys his concerns for the health of his new friend. As the end of the second hour draws near, the associate is persuaded to go with the volunteer for evaluation at a healthcare facility that works closely with ALAP. The associate informs the volunteer that he has no medical insurance and no money for any sort of medical treatment. The volunteer says a silent prayer that the facility will at least see the associate and diagnose the problem and offer some treatment to stabilize the patient until other arrangements can be made.

The emergency room is packed and the ER Psychiatric Department is several patients behind when the lawyers arrive at 3:00 pm. The associates' conduct and demeanor grow steadily more hostile and uncooperative as the volunteer uses every argument he and another volunteer present by telephone can generate to keep the distressed fellow lawyer at the facility. At 12:45 am the volunteer leaves the facility with the associate finally admitted for minimal treatment for an acute psychotic episode exacerbated by the high level of work and financial stress accumulated on the associate. Three days later the associate is released with a prescription and some follow-up appointments. With no insurance and no money, even the most generous facilities must minimize their involvement.

The volunteer quietly crawls into bed at 2:00 am as his wife asks how it went. The volunteer says: "It went well. He is safe for tonight".

Three nights later the volunteer is asleep when his telephone rings at 11:30 pm. The voice is that of a longtime lawyer friend from south Alabama: "We just found John. He tried to kill himself today. He's in ICU. What do we do?"

"I'll be there by six". The volunteer kisses his sleeping wife at 3:30 am and says: "I'll be home when I can. I love you".

Drug addiction, alcoholism and mental illness kill. The battle is often times waged with hand to hand combat between the disease, the victim and a volunteer that has found

the way out. The volunteers on the LHL committee are grateful for the opportunity to help their fellow lawyers regain their physical, mental and emotional health and re-establish their careers.