

The Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund

A Gift that Keeps on Giving

By Martha D. Burkett

It is time again for me to remind you about the Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program (LJAP)/Brighton Hospital Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund as a giving opportunity in the new year. Rather than write an article, I have elected to share with you an unsolicited written testimonial submitted by an anonymous Michigan attorney who contacted me seeking funds for treatment last winter. When she called LJAP, it was obvious that her situation was critical, and it was frustrating to have to tell her that the Steinberg Memorial Treatment funds she was calling about had already been depleted.

Knowing that Brighton Hospital has a commitment to helping people, I encouraged the caller to remain optimistic and let me investigate alternative resources. I obtained her name and phone number, gave her my direct contact information, and tentatively hung up the phone. I immediately contacted Steve Anderson, clinical director at Brighton Hospital, and explained to him the dilemma I faced: a truly desperate, impaired attorney with limited resources in dire need of treatment. Steve quickly assured me that he knew of a funding source that might get our caller into treatment, provided she met certain criteria. He suggested that I have her call him directly to determine her eligi-

bility and facilitate a speedy admission. I did just that. The rest, in this case, is her story.

June 4, 2010

Anonymous
Women's Halfway House
12851 Grand River
Brighton, MI 48116

Re: My Gratitude to LJAP

Dear Lawyers and Judges Assistance Committee:

On February 18, 2010, I entered Brighton Hospital. The day prior, I had been on one of two binges within the past two weeks, each consisting of multiple days. My sister was fed up with me, had enough of the tension inherent in living with an alcoholic, had enough of the verbal abuse, had enough of the things that I broke "unintentionally" (she is [on] social security disability and [can't] afford to replace things), and had enough of living in fear of finding me dead.

I went to stay in a hotel and continued to drink. I contemplated suicide; I just did not know how to do it. I had no pills, and I could not thrust a knife into myself. During that night, I thought of Richard Steinberg, a lawyer I was acquainted with who

had committed suicide. I thought how desperate he must have been to actually pull the trigger and end his life. I thought of him several times that night. I had no idea why he came into my thoughts more than once that night. I had not thought of him since immediately after his death.

The following day, I spoke to an attorney friend who had been trying to speak to me (she had known Richard Steinberg quite well). Rather than chastising me for not returning calls, she informed me that she happened to read an article in the *Michigan Bar Journal* about the Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund. The fund put four lawyers through in-patient treatment at Brighton Hospital the previous year. She gave me Martha Burkett's number (from LJAP) to call for help. Unfortunately, the Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund had no more funding to help me.

Within minutes, I spoke with Steve Anderson of Brighton Hospital. He informed me that Brighton Hospital had a bed for me and that my treatment would be paid for through a scholarship. I was admitted the following day. I spent 3 days in detoxification, then in rehabilitation for another 12 days. The next step in my treatment was partial hospitalization. I begged, however, to be allowed to stay in rehabilitation for two more weeks; I knew I needed more one-on-one therapy. My fervent wish was granted.

My treatment continued when my therapist and other team members at Brighton strongly suggested that I move to the women's halfway house. I had received a scholarship for this part of my treatment as well. I have been at the halfway house for almost 2½ months and will be leaving.

I never thought I would be clean and sober. I knew my willpower was no longer enough. I knew within a few short months

I never would have been released from the bondage of this disease had it not been for LJAP and the wonderful services that it provides.

In LJAP, I have found a loving and understanding commitment to recovery of attorneys' and judges' alcoholism and addiction.

I would be dead, given the huge amount of alcohol I drank on a daily basis. Because I had no income for treatment, I consigned myself to death. I also knew that unless someone took the bottle, quite literally, out of my hands and made it impossible for me to get it, I would never be sober. The hospitalization I [needed] seemed so far out of my reach.

My treatment at Brighton Hospital allowed me to detoxify. I immediately felt better. The rehabilitation program saved my life. For the first time, I understood the disease of alcoholism, how it was not my fault that I could not stop drinking, that I had an allergic reaction to the drug, and that, although not curable, alcoholism can be controlled.

A whole new life opened up to me. I discovered that other alcoholics and addicts had the same kind of experiences as I did, and sharing those experiences with each other made me feel better about myself. I am not a bad person.

At Brighton Hospital, I was taught tools and coping skills that I never would have found on my own. I had a world of hurt and no idea how to release it. Now I understand that beating myself up will do nothing to aid in my recovery. The importance of really working a 12-step program was drilled into me. *I now want recovery for a lifetime; I never want to go back to that horrible, horrible existence.*

I never would have been released from the bondage of this disease had it not been for LJAP and the wonderful services that it provides. In LJAP, I have found a loving and understanding commitment to recovery of attorneys' and judges' alcoholism and addiction.

LJAP, through Ms. Burkett, did not end its support of my recovery when I entered the hospital grounds. Ms. Burkett visited me several times while I was at Brighton Hospital and explained the LJAP monitoring program to me. I signed a release so she could review

all my treatment records. Not only did she review them, but she consulted with my therapist at Brighton Hospital to facilitate my recovery and needs upon discharge.

While I was still in the hospital, Ms. Burkett provided me with information regarding a therapy group in the Detroit area and a therapist who would work with me on a sliding-fee scale when I left Brighton Hospital. In fact, he reduced his hourly rate by half.

I recently contacted Ms. Burkett because I will be leaving the women's halfway house in two weeks. I informed her that I will no longer be living in the Detroit area and was wondering if I was still eligible for the LJAP monitoring program. She assured me that the program was available in the farm country near Saginaw.

Although I have not yet begun the monitoring program, I feel blessed that such a program awaits my release. It is one more safeguard for my continuing sobriety. LJAP is also providing its services on a sliding-fee scale.

I was fortunate that my alcoholism never harmed any client (I still did good work, however inefficiently it might have been performed) or member of the public, nor did it bring shame to our profession. I suspect, though, it may only have been a matter of time.

My alcoholism did, however, ruin my legal career. Employer after employer "released" me from my position because of absenteeism. My finances are in shambles. Now, however, I look forward to returning to the work world. Since the fog of alcoholism has been lifted, I have more confidence than ever in my legal abilities. I look ahead with excitement to rejuvenating my professional career.

I would not be alive today if not for LJAP and its connection with Brighton Hospital. So many attorneys and judges need treatment. LJAP is a godsend and so necessary

given the stress of our profession. There is not enough thanks or praise for the lives and legal careers LJAP has already saved, mine included, or for those to come.

I am solidly into my recovery. I have never felt physically, mentally, or spiritually better than I do now. I thank my higher power every day for connecting me with LJAP.

With Tremendous Gratitude,
Anonymous

In this situation, Brighton Hospital was able to help our caller in spite of the fact that the Steinberg funds were depleted, but this will not always be the case. Please help LJAP effectively assist your peers by making a tax-deductible donation to the Richard Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund. Help us so that we don't have to say, "I am sorry, but there is nothing left" to lawyers who are suffering and need the fund to get treatment. These attorneys deserve the opportunity to heal, and they need your help. With proper treatment and support, they can return to full professional and social functioning and begin to help others who are in need. You may also support the Steinberg Memorial Treatment Fund by attending or sponsoring our third annual Evening of Enlightenment on April 28. Look for our save-the-date ad in this issue of the *Bar Journal*.

For more information about making a donation or registering for the Evening of Enlightenment, visit <http://www.brightonhospital.org> or contact Maya McElroy at (810) 225-2531. ■



Martha D. Burkett is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program. Ms. Burkett has completed her master's degrees in public administration and counseling education, and is both a licensed professional counselor and a nationally certified counselor. She has completed graduate certification in holistic health and has achieved level II certification in addictions counseling. She is certified as an advanced-level board certified interventionist and as an approved clinical supervisor.