



EDITORIALNOTE

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The unwinnable game

Geoff Gallop recently wrote in the *Brisbane Times* that depression is as much a social issue as it is a medical issue and that “our highly pressured, ‘winner-take-all’ society can, in and of itself, represent an unbeatable challenge”.

For lawyers, such an unbeatable challenge may exist around their timesheets. It’s an added stress and strain to the environment in which lawyers work that, for those individuals with a predisposition to depression, can translate into debilitating illness.

Michael Bradley, founder of Marque Lawyers, has lashed out at billable hours this week, describing them as a “horrible” way for a lawyer to have to evaluate themselves and linking such practices to depression.

He told *Lawyers Weekly* journalist Claire Chaffey that timesheets might be an efficient business model but that they are “basically inhuman”.

Bradley joins a growing list of individuals publicly declaring a link between billable hours and depression.

Earlier this year, Western Australian Chief Justice Wayne Martin made such a link, declaring that substance abuse and high levels of depression in lawyers may come down to the “alienating” impact of time billing.

Although a number of studies have revealed high rates of depression amongst lawyers – like the 2008 study by the Brain and Mind Institute that found almost one third of solic-

itors are affected by depression – there appears to be little by way of direct research linking billable hours to depression.

Instead, we rely on anecdotal evidence. And at *Lawyers Weekly*, we have heard from numerous lawyers over the years who have declared a strong connection between timesheets and career dissatisfaction. For some lawyers, it’s even worse – they say their direct experiences with timesheets have contributed to their depression.

As well as seeking to provide help for those affected by depression, we must also seek to address its underlying courses.

Law firms are not denying the prevalence of depression in their ranks. In fact, with most large Australian law firms involved in the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation, many are moving to tackle the disease and to promote a workplace culture that supports those suffering from it. These moves should be applauded, and were culminated in the launch of the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation Website last month (see www.tjmf.org.au).

However, it’s one thing to provide support for lawyers suffering from depression, but how long can we continue to deny the underlying reasons for the high prevalence of depression in the legal profession in the first place?

Have your say on depression in law via our online poll at www.lawyersweekly.com.au