

# Managing the Second Wave: Mental Health, Resilience and Resources

**LAWPRO CPD, presented with the Toronto Lawyers Association**

**February 5, 2021 (9:30 AM to 11:00 AM); 90 minutes Professionalism content**

## **Speakers**

Teresa Donnelly, Treasurer (President), Law Society of Ontario

Doron Gold, Staff Clinician and Presenter, Homewood Health

Orlando Da Silva, LSM, Chief Administrator / CEO, Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada

Mahwash Khan, Communications Counsel, Chair, EDI Advisory Group, LAWPRO

Juda Strawczynski, Director, practicePRO, LAWPRO

## **Opening**

- Opening remarks (Juda)
- Land Acknowledgment (Mahwash)
- Panel content summary and introduction (Juda)

## **1. Overview: The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Lawyers' Mental Health**

### **Lead speakers**

- Doron Gold (overview of the lawyer baseline for mental health; general composite case studies of what MAP is seeing through COVID-19 to date)
- Teresa Donnelly (what the LSO is seeing this year with respect to impact on lawyers)
- Juda Strawczynski (what LAWPRO is seeing with respect to the pandemic's impact on legal practices and lawyers)

### **Background**

- General lawyer mental health background
  - a) 1 in 5 Canadians struggle with mental illness in any given year – Mental Health Commission of Canada
  - b) ABA says that the likelihood of depression is 3.6 times higher for practising lawyers
  - c) "Lawyerly thinking" can lead to pessimism, perfectionism, anxiety; social isolation can lead to depression and substance abuse

## **2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of COVID-19/Working from home**

- a) COVID-19 anxiety and fear for our health / safety of others
  - Working through a pandemic – it's understandable that people are anxious about a disruptive, lethal threat that has brought down how we normally live our lives
  - Fear for loved ones we can't visit (parents, etc.)
  - Managing anxiety of others in the home (partners, children, others)
  - Social isolation (from colleagues; for those living alone)
- b) Economic uncertainty and recession

- Economic uncertainty and recession due to the pandemic has a negative impact on many practices, which impacts mental health
- c) Work from home stress and tips
  - Lack of resources, space, and makeshift “online” workplaces decreases productivity and effectiveness
  - Difficulty concentrating, finding uninterrupted time for work
  - Disruptions to work practices can lead to increased anxiety about getting work done
  - Work-life blur
  - Managing work while taking care of children / caregiver responsibilities/ home schooling
  - Technology issues

### **3. COVID-19 impacts on vicarious trauma risks for lawyers**

#### **Lead speakers**

- Teresa Donnelly (worked as a prosecutor for more than 26 years and dealt with cases involving homicide, domestic violence, sexual assault, etc.)
- Doron Gold

#### **Background**

- Vicarious trauma is a form of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is a state of tension and preoccupation on the stories/trauma experienced by clients when lawyers become a reservoir of other people’s trauma
- COVID-19 impacts on risk of vicarious trauma

#### **Potential questions**

- What are the symptoms of vicarious trauma, and how can lawyers be cognizant of its effects?
- How are lawyers at risk for vicarious trauma through COVID-19?
- How can lawyers provide effective service while emotionally distancing themselves from their clients and files?

### **4. How can lawyers improve their mental health and avoid mental health problems?**

#### **Lead speakers**

- Orlando Da Silva (served as a “wellness mentor in residence” at University of Ottawa. Can speak to wellness advice for law students as well as lawyers)
- Doron Gold (can speak to what the MAP offers, counseling and peer assistance).
- Mahwash Khan (can speak to systems and policies in the workplace that lead to positive wellness outcomes)

#### **Potential questions**

- What steps can lawyers take to maintain their mental health? (E.g., building resilience, mindfulness techniques [self-compassion], healthy lifestyle, etc.)

- What resources are available for lawyers to deal with existing or potential mental health problems? (E.g., MAP, firm resources, etc.)
- How should lawyers go about seeking assistance from organizations and peers?
- What can lawyers do to address doom scrolling and poor work/life balance?

**5. How can lawyers help and look out for one another? How can law firms take steps to help?**  
**Reducing the stigma associated with mental health; shifting workplace culture**

**Lead speakers**

- Orlando Da Silva (see above)
- Doron Gold (see above)
- Mahwash Khan (can speak to systems/policies in the workplace that lead to positive wellness outcomes; awareness campaigns, empathy; emotional contagion)

**Background**

Legal professionals in Ontario seek mental health assistance at a rate that is approximately half that of other professions (taken from Homewood data)

**Potential questions**

- What are some flags that raise concerns about the mental health of coworkers and friends?
- How should lawyers address these issues with coworkers, friends, or family members?
- What can those in leadership positions do to promote mental health in their workplace (check-in, validate anxiety, distribute resources, highlight what's going well, lead by example)
- How can lawyers decrease the negative stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems

**6. Rapid round: practical tips**

- 5 practical tips for individual resilience, 5 practical tips for law firms / leaders
- Each speaker to provide a tip

**Concluding remarks**

- How to get help (Doron, Orlando)
- Supports/resources that are available
- Housekeeping and thank you (Juda)

This program will be available as a replay on practicePRO.ca's CPD webpage, with links to the resources

This program is eligible for 1.5 hours of Professionalism and for LAWPRO's Risk Management Credit, which can be claimed at lawpro.ca.