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Stressed out by the practice of law? Try some *regular* exercise!

Many of us recall in world history class the Spanish explorer, Ponce de León, who, during the late 15th and early 16th centuries, sailed from Spain to the New World – principally to the Caribbean and the area he named La Florida – in search of the Fountain of Youth among other things. History reflects that he never found it.

Had Ponce de León engaged in a daily, vigorous 60 minutes of calisthenics on his ship deck during the trip over, when he arrived he may have declared something akin to the epiphany voiced by the ancient Greek, Archimedes – “Eureka! I found it!” Ponce de León’s exclamation might have been “Eureka! The Fountain of Youth can be found in regular exercise, and it’s a great way to relieve stress!”

Have you ever felt stressed out by the practice of law? If you haven’t, you belong to an extremely small, exclusive group. Lawyers live and work in an environment full of deadlines and conflict – maximizing billable hours, satisfying clients and partners, making money, “winning your case,” and experiencing many other pressure points, all of which generate high stress and anxiety.

Numerous studies over the years have borne this out – the practice of law, for both judges and lawyers – is a high-stress occupation. More recent studies confirm that this stress starts in law school. In fact, some studies point to a higher stress level in law school than in medical school.

High stress over extended periods can lead to many things, most of which are bad. Depression, drug and alcohol addiction, suicide ideation (and suicide), family breakups, etc., are byproducts of high stress.

In 1997, the Indiana Judges & Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) – recognized as the “gold standard” for similar programs throughout the country – was formed to help and assist judges and lawyers who were experiencing these kinds of difficulties in their personal and professional lives, the source of many being the high-stress environment in which they worked. Metaphorically, JLAP “deals with the horse once it has bolted out of the barn.” JLAP reacts and engages once the judge or lawyer is in need. Another, more proactive, approach might be, again

metaphorically, “What can be done to keep the horse in the barn?”

Enter “wellness” and *regular* exercise. Studies confirm that a healthy lifestyle, to include regular exercise, can, in many cases, serve to reduce and alleviate stress.

In February, the ISBA Board of Governors established a Standing Committee on Wellness, the purpose of which is to promote and encourage healthy living and regular exercise amongst judges, lawyers, their respective staffs and law students. Committee chairs Don Lundberg, former executive secretary of the state’s Disciplinary Commission, and Terry Harrell, executive director of JLAP, have pulled together a group of believers – throughout the state to plan and organize wellness initiatives directed at Indiana’s legal community.

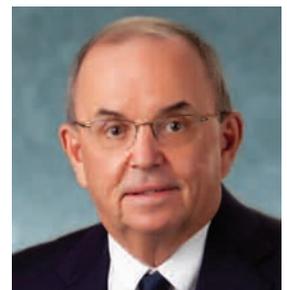
The committee is collaborating with three state agencies – InShape Indiana, Tobacco Prevention & Cessation Agency and DOH Division of Nutrition & Physical Activity.

The name of the initiative – “Fit to Practice” – stems from Don’s recent article titled “Lawyers and Wellness” in *Res Gestae* (July/August 2011, p. 41) where he properly observed:

Does lawyer wellness have anything to do with legal ethics and professional responsibility? I say *yes*. Even though Rules of Professional Conduct direct us in our duties to clients, courts and third parties, they are largely silent about ourselves. Even so, we can’t effectively discharge our responsibilities to others if we don’t take care of ourselves.

The initiative is a work in progress with many efforts to engage the Indiana legal community to practice and promote wellness and regular exercise. Some of these efforts will likely include (1) periodic communications

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PRESIDENT’S PERSPECTIVE
C. Erik Chickedantz
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through *Res Gestae, e-Addendum* and ISBA social media promoting wellness and regular exercise; (2) organizing and promoting wellness events in conjunction with other ISBA activities throughout the state; (3) direct interaction with law students to organize and promote wellness activities; (4) develop and propose ISBA wellness program policy guidelines for lawyers and law firms; (5) collaborating with other wellness programs to promote ISBA involvement; and (6) other initiatives – like I said, this is a work in progress.

I've never professed to be a rocket scientist, and I don't intend to start now. I think simple, common sense ideas frequently best express the goals of a program. For the wellness initiative, it goes something like this:

A healthy person has a better chance of being a happy person; a healthy, happy person has a better chance of being a productive person, which, on the whole, is a better person in our society. So the aim is to seek to be a healthy, happy, productive person – be it a judge, lawyer, law student, anybody.

Stay tuned for bulletins from the ISBA Wellness Committee, *and remember – regular exercise unlocks the Fountain of Youth.* 🗨️