

# BarCARES and LAP—Working in Harmony

BY ZEB BARNHARDT AND ROBYNN MORAITES

**T**here is some confusion for some between the NC Lawyer Assistance Program (NC LAP) and BarCARES. We hope to clear up the confusion. Both programs assist

lawyers who need counseling, medications, or treatment for the full panoply of addictions and mental health issues. Both are confidential

programs. Both are also free of charge. But they operate very differently—each working as a superb complement to the other.

NC LAP is a program of the NC State Bar, and the BarCARES Program is sponsored by the NC Bar Association (NCBA). BarCARES provides referral for counseling services to lawyers who are either members of the NCBA or of local bar associations that have subscribed to the program. The program also serves district court judges, paralegals, and members of the Eastern Bankruptcy Institute. Members in qualifying districts are entitled to three free visits a year with a counselor in the BarCARES referral network. In many districts, a unique feature of BarCARES is that any of the three free annual visits may be used by a family member and are not limited to only the lawyer. Following the free visits offered within BarCARES, an attorney can generally continue work with the same counselor, if need be, using insurance benefits.

All BarCARES contact is made through HRC Behavioral Health & Psychiatry, PA, the organization that administers and arranges counseling provider services for the BarCARES program. BarCARES has a network of counselors and therapists across the state who specialize in treating a wide variety of mental health and addiction conditions, as well as work with normal stress and personal dilemmas that could interfere with lawyer performance and/or quality of life.

NC LAP provides services to all lawyers, judges (both federal and state), and law students in the state. While NC LAP has three full-time, licensed counselors on staff and provides some short-term or targeted direct counseling services, most of their work involves initial assessment, referral, and longer-term support and case management. First, NC LAP

provides an initial consult to determine what issues most need attention and assistance. NC LAP then refers lawyers to counseling services that are likely the best fit, or makes treatment recommendations based on the unique needs of the lawyer. NC LAP may pull from its network of over 200 lawyer and judge volunteers across the state who have overcome similar issues, and connect the lawyer with a peer support person or a lawyer discussion group. For lawyers who are recovering from any drug or alcohol problems, NC LAP supports them when they return from treatment for the first few years with mentor pairing, support groups, and case management. NC LAP also runs peer support and discussion groups across the state. These groups are not limited to lawyers recovering from alcohol or drug problems—lawyers dealing with stress,



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depression, and other issues also benefit. Many lawyers who engage with NC LAP long term eventually become volunteers. NC LAP provides ongoing training for its volunteers, and through its support groups and annual conferences, volunteers and clients become a tight-knit community across the state.

BarCARES and NC LAP work cooperatively and cross-refer. For example, if a lawyer contacts NC LAP and is located in a BarCARES district, in the event long-term counseling is recommended (and it almost always is), NC LAP will match the lawyer with the most suitable counselor in the BarCARES network, so that the first three visits each year are free. For example, NC LAP counselors know which counselors in the BarCARES network specialize in career counseling, divorce, depression, and the like. And NC LAP can pair client and therapist personalities and approaches—sometimes we need a

comforting ear, sometimes we need a kick in the rear. Getting that match right is important. Sometimes a lawyer has a unique issue that requires a specialized counselor. When NC LAP has requested that lawyers be paired with such specialists, BarCARES has agreed to bring those NC LAP-recommended counselors “in network” for the benefit of the lawyer. This has proved especially helpful in smaller, more rural districts. Similarly, if a lawyer has been seeing a counselor in the BarCARES network, and the counselor thinks the lawyer would benefit from additional support like speaking to peers who have overcome similar issues, or that the lawyer needs more comprehensive, engaged support than traditional therapy can provide, the BarCARES counselor will recommend that the lawyer contact NC LAP. Lawyers who are cross-referred in this way sign releases allowing the BarCARES and NC LAP counselors to

confer about what would be most helpful to the lawyer along the way. Lawyers who take advantage of these programs fare incredibly well and receive a network of support enjoyed by few.

Both programs are confidential and work together for the good of North Carolina’s legal community. Each program can be contacted independently. Few states have such comprehensive resources available to their lawyers and judges. We should count ourselves lucky. ■

*Zeb Barnhardt practiced for 30 years in corporate and securities law. He was a member of the founding Board of Directors of BarCARES of North Carolina; chaired a task force to bring BarCARES and the NC LAP together to focus on common goals; and now serves as president of LAP Foundation of North Carolina, Inc.*

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### The Robin Williams in Each of Us

By Ronnie Ansley

When you look in the mirror, do you ever see Robin Williams staring back at you? Every attorney who has ever dealt with a client is in many ways like Robin Williams, in more ways than you may have considered. No, we are not funny all of the time, but we are relieving the pressures life can heap upon our clients, whether by their own doing or by someone else’s. Each of us is called upon to deal with the part of our population which, in many cases, cannot handle their own problems without the assistance of the professional who can say and do the things which will ease their situation, even if only for a short time.

When the audience arrives, the curtain goes up, and no matter what is going on in the life of the performer—whether Robin Williams or the attorney—the nerves must steady, the brain must switch on, and the words that come out must comfort, console, amuse, or otherwise ease the crowd. When information is conveyed that makes the audience/client uncomfortable, something must follow that will ease the crowd and make them feel as if they have not wasted their money on useless babble.

While a client is with the lawyer, the stage is lit and the performer is the most insightful person in the world. The client

believes the person they are with has insight and understanding they could only wish for. They turn their problems over to the lawyer and allow their problems to leave them. The problems are heaped upon the lawyer, who is left to deal with them—deal with them in a way that will make the client the good guy, no matter what the problem is. The client feels the attorney should make him or her laugh, cry, forget the problems, feel better—take the weight of the world off of his/her shoulders and put it on their own.

When the client leaves the venue, the attorneys, like Robin Williams, must study, work, review, prepare, practice, and spend countless hours getting ready for the next client/show/battle. The client is long gone, leaving the attorney to not only do the work and heavy lifting, but also the worrying about the client’s situation. Over time, bit by bit, the pressure begins to wear on the attorney and his/her mental attitude.

Comedians are always supposed to be funny, and attorneys are always supposed to be mentally strong, fighting for the client’s desired outcome, no matter what. We all know this is NOT correct nor a healthy way to live. However, too many of our colleagues buy into this way of thinking, which is detrimental to the attorney, the attorney’s family, the attorney’s business, and every part of the attorney’s per-

sonal and professional life. Left uncorrected, this type of thinking can be deadly. Far too often we lose brothers and sisters in our profession to depression, drug/alcohol abuse, or suicide.

IF you or someone you know is suffering, feeling alone, or is at the end of the rope, please know YOU ARE NOT ALONE. Talk to a friend or colleague, talk to a counselor, or contact the BarCARES Program or the NC Lawyer Assistance Program. We are very fortunate in NC to have some of the best resources in the country when it comes to lawyers’ mental health.

We all need somewhere and someone to turn to, to lean on, and to rely upon when we have reached the end of our rope. You have options. You have friends. You are not alone. Reaching out for assistance is a sign of strength, not weakness. We lost Robin Williams far too soon. You are an important part of our legal family, the legal community, and we need you healthy and happy for many years to come. ■

*Ronnie Ansley practices primarily in the areas of criminal & juvenile law, from traffic tickets to murder cases. Ronnie also works with parents of defiant children and offers consulting services to fellow attorneys helping them develop a “theory of the case” for upcoming criminal and civil trials.*