



## “EN-TÊTE” campaign on mental health

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### **ADDICTIONS**

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*By Rose-Marie Charest, psychologist*

As part of the “EN-TÊTE” campaign, let’s talk about addiction and try to understand it.

How do you know when something has become an addiction? Needing something, in itself, is not an addiction. For instance, needing oxygen is not problematic.

It becomes an addiction once you start needing something that harms you.

You consume alcohol, drugs, prescription medication or food, or you gamble. All these things can be a source of pleasure or a need you have at some time during your life.

Lawyers are often invited for drinks or a meal. Does this become an addiction because of how often you do it, or because of the quantity you eat or drink? No. It becomes an addiction when you want to cut down, but the urge is stronger than you and you end up doing it anyway. You want to limit yourself to two or three glasses, but day after day you consume more than that. And the next day, you regret it. You start hiding the reality, or altering it: “I only had one glass!”

You may want to control your consumption, but what characterizes addiction is having no control. Addiction must be viewed as an illness, and just as for any illness, you have to seek help and treatment.

Sometimes, an addiction is clear and easy to identify, but sometimes it’s harder to pin down, such as an emotional addiction, for instance. When you’re in love, where is the dividing line between love and a state of emotional addiction? When you’re in love with someone, it’s natural to feel the need to see them. The need itself is not a problem. However, it becomes an addiction if you need to continue in a relationship with someone who is destructive for you, who destroys your physical or psychological integrity.

There are treatments and assistance programs. Lawyers have an assistance program available to them based on proven data. There are now some very good strategies for helping people with an addiction. Don’t feel judged, or feel that it isn’t really an illness or that you have a weakness. For lawyers, it’s sometimes hard to live with having a weakness. But the strength you regain once you have dealt with an addiction is great strength indeed.

To detect a situation of addiction, ask yourself the right questions:

- Do I often wonder if I should quit?

- When I try to quit, do I fail?
- Do I feel physically ill?
- Is my self-esteem affected by this addiction?

You have a lot to gain from dealing with your addiction. I encourage you to talk about it to at least one person. Lawyers can speak in complete confidence to PAMBA, the assistance program for members of the Barreau du Québec, a program that has been in operation since 1996, helping lawyers cope with a range of problems, particularly addiction. You won't be the first person they've met with, and you can be sure that they will have the same respect for you after as they did before.

Seek help, make use of the appropriate resources, then rediscover how strong you are without an addiction!