



LawCare Ltd.
Health Support and Advice for Lawyers

Drugs

LawCare Helplines

For Solicitors, Law Students and Legal Executives in England and Wales:
0800 279 6888

For Solicitors, Advocates and Law Students
in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man
0800 279 6869

For Barristers, Barristers Clerks and Judges
in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
0800 018 4299

For Solicitors in the Republic of Ireland: 1800 991801

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Drugs

The legal profession is a stressful one, and although it can be extremely rewarding, challenging and varied, long hours and high demands can take their toll. Different lawyers respond to this stress in different ways. Some leave, some turn to alcohol, and many feel that drugs help them get through the difficult times—perhaps by keeping them alert, or helping them to unwind at the weekend.

Since it began operating in 1997, LawCare had helped over 2,000 lawyers, around a quarter of them suffering from a serious addiction. However, in almost all cases the addiction was to alcohol; LawCare receives comparatively few calls about drug misuse, despite the fact that we know that there are high levels of drug use within the profession. Many of those calling our helpline speak frankly about colleagues who use cocaine or stimulants, and yet it is extremely rare for a caller to report their own drug use.

We believe that this is because, with drugs being illegal, many lawyers are reluctant to admit to anyone, even on a confidential helpline, that they have a problem. Even more cannot admit it to themselves. Like any addiction, denial is a real issue. As the substance of choice (be it an illegal or prescription drug, alcohol, food or something else) becomes more and more important in the addict's life, he will subconsciously refuse to ascribe any of his increasing problems to it.

What is Drug Dependency?

The term "drug dependency" describes a situation where a person is using drugs in such a way that their social relationships and physical or emotional welfare are affected. A person who is drug dependent will have a strong desire for a particular drug and will increasingly need larger amounts of the drug to achieve the same effect as before. If they stop using the drug for a while and then start taking it again the craving for the drug quickly reappears. Stopping the drug can lead to physical "withdrawal" symptoms such as nausea and shaking; if this happens the person is physically dependent on the drug. Drug use becomes the centre of the person's life, and other activities (including employment) and pleasures are progressively neglected. As a result, relationships with family, friends and others may suffer. In most cases, the addiction, if untreated, can result in death.

How common is drug use?

The use of some drugs, such as heroin and cannabis, has actually fallen slightly over the last few years as people become more aware of the problems and stigma associated with it. However, newer drugs such as crystal meth are becoming an increasing problem, and drugs no longer seem to be the domain of the homeless or criminal classes. At LawCare we have anecdotal evidence that many lawyers are using cocaine and similar drugs because they think it will help them cope with the pace of work. The latest statistics show that 4.8% of the population use drugs, with cannabis being by far the most common.

What Are the Addictive Drugs?

There is much debate at present about whether certain drugs are addictive. Many try to claim that cannabis and cocaine are not addictive, but all drugs can be psychologically addictive if the user begins to depend on the drug to raise their mood, help them get through difficult times or dull their emotions.

Several studies have looked into which drugs are the most addictive based on factors including tolerance, withdrawal and reinforcement. Combining the findings of these studies, the most addictive substances in order are:

	Name of Drug	Effect on user	Dangers	Further help
1.	Nicotine	Makes user feel relaxed; Suppresses appetite.	96% of users become addicted. Linked to cancers of lungs, etc., heart disease, etc. generally resulting in premature death. Smoking when pregnant harms the baby.	LawCare "Stop Smoking" pack. NHS Quitline 0800 022 4332 Also many other organisations and self help books, etc.
2.	Crystal Meth	Intense "rush" of exhilaration and arousal with increased activity and awareness levels lasting up to 12 hours. Suppresses appetite and activity levels.	92% of users become addicted. Can lead to high blood pressure, increased heart rate and stroke. Linked to psychosis and brain damage. Causes extreme aging of skin and rotting of teeth.	Frank 0800 776600 www.talktofrank.com
3.	Crack Cocaine	Immediate effect—causes user to feel wide awake, confident and enthusiastic but lasts only 10 minutes.	Very psychologically addictive due to low moods and sometimes flu-like symptoms when effect wears off. Causes long-term changes in the nervous system. Exacerbates pre-existing heart and mental conditions. Easy to overdose.	Narcotics Anonymous 0845 373 3366 www.ukna.org
4.	Heroin	Reduces physical and psychological pain, gives the user a feeling of warmth, well-being and contentment.	Highly addictive, leads to craving, tolerance and unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. Easy to overdose. Injecting can lead to gangrene of limbs, and infection with HIV or hepatitis.	Drugline 0808 1 606 606 Your GP can refer you for specialist counselling and inpatient treatment on the NHS if required (there may be a waiting list) or prescribe medication to reduce cravings or counteract the high.
5.	Cocaine	Causes user to feel wide awake, confident and enthusiastic but lasts only 30 minutes.	Very psychologically addictive due to low moods and sometimes flu-like symptoms when effect wears off. Causes long-term changes in the nervous system. Exacerbates pre-existing heart and mental conditions. Easy to overdose.	
6.	Valium and Related Benzodiazepines	Relieve tension and anxiety and make the user feel calm, relaxed and sometimes sleepy.	Can lead to memory loss and overdose when taken with other depressant drugs such as alcohol. Withdrawal symptoms can occur after only four weeks' use.	
7.	Alcohol	Tends to exaggerate whatever mood the drinker is in to start with. Can relieve tension and make the drinker feel more sociable.	One in ten becomes addicted. Causes anti-social behaviour and violence, traffic accidents, causes severe birth defects if pregnant women drink, and can lead to liver cancer and other liver problems, stomach and throat cancers, pancreatitis and death.	LawCare packs, "Alcohol", Caring About a Problem Drinker", "An Alcoholic in our Firm" AA 0845 769 7555 Drinkline 0800 917 8282

	Name of Drug	Effect on user	Dangers	Further help
8.	Caffeine	Causes drinker to feel more alert and awake.	May lead to sleep problems. Withdrawal symptoms include headaches, jitteriness, mood swings and problems with concentration. Can also lead to cancers of the pancreas and bladder, hypoglycaemia and central nervous system disorders.	No specific help groups. See your GP if adversely affected by caffeine addiction.
9.	Marijuana (Cannabis)	Causes user to feel more aware of their senses, relaxed, happy and talkative.	10-14% of users become addicted. Can lead to paranoia, anxiety and severe mental illness. Harms the baby if used during pregnancy. Exacerbates pre-existing heart conditions.	Frank 0800 776600 Narcotics Anonymous 0845 373 3366
10.	Ecstasy / Amphetamines	Causes user to feel alert and alive and experience sounds and colours more intensely. Users often feel great love for the people they're with and the strangers around them.	Short term effects include anxiety, panic attacks, paranoia and psychotic states. Can also lead to death through dehydration and dangerous reactions in users with heart conditions, asthma, eczema and blood pressure problems.	Drugsline 0808 1 606 606 Your GP.

How is drug dependency treated?

Treatment of drug dependency involves treating both the physical and psychological problems that result from drug use. Medical treatment may be necessary for health problems related to drug use, such as liver disease. If a person is physically dependent on a drug he or she will need to undergo detoxification. This involves replacing the drug with a prescription medicine and gradually reducing the dose to minimise the occurrence of withdrawal symptoms.

The mainstay of most treatment for drug dependency is an intensive programme of group work and individual counselling aimed at helping the person to develop strategies to cope without the use of drugs and to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Various activities may be used to encourage the person to recognise the problems that led them to become drug dependent and to overcome these problems by developing self esteem and positive attitudes. Often therapists may themselves have been treated for drug dependency and so can empathise with their patients, helping them to accept that abstinence is not an impossible dream but an attractive and realistic option.

In-patient treatment for drug dependency in a specialised hospital normally lasts about 5-6 weeks but, depending on the degree of addiction and desire of the addict to break free, out-patient treatment or even voluntary attendance at self-help groups such as Narcotics Anonymous may be effective.

Treatment for drug dependency can be a stressful time for patients because they have to confront and resolve their underlying problems and learn to cope without a drug that was once central to their life. Support from family, friends and colleagues is therefore vital for successful treatment.

If you or a family member, friend or colleague is dependent on a drug then help can be obtained from a number of sources. LawCare (call free on 0800 279 6888) has details of counsellors, hospitals and treatment centres throughout the country and can make referrals and offer advice not only on treatment but on how the matter might be handled within the profession. Your GP is also a good starting point, or contact Narcotics Anonymous on 020 7251 4007 (weekdays) and 020 7730 0009 (weekends).

Is it OK for Lawyers to use Drugs?

However you justify your drug use to yourself, and whatever your personal views on the legalisation of cannabis issue, or any other drug matter, the fact remains that drugs are illegal. Neither the police nor your professional body will take your opinions into account and your position of trust within the community means that local and even national papers may consider your drug user a matter of public interest.

According to the Solicitors Regulation Authority Professional Ethics Department, even a minor drugs conviction is likely to be considered a breach of rule 1.06 which states "you must not behave in a way that is likely to diminish the trust the public places in you or the profession". As a result you may appear before the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. A striking off would not be automatic, and the penalty would largely depend on the circumstances.

If presented with a Barrister who had a conviction for a drug offence, or who had been reported to them as abusing drugs, the Bar Standards Board would consider the circumstances and disciplinary action may follow. Two considerations apply:

- Is the barrister fit to practice? This issue refers to medical and physical ability as opposed to moral and ethical considerations
- Has rule 301 been breached? This rule states that a barrister must not engage in conduct which is "discreditable to a barrister" or "likely to diminish public confidence in the legal profession".

Barristers should also bear in mind that the Bar is a very competitive profession. If solicitors' firms become aware of the problem they will be less likely to instruct counsel they consider to be a liability.

Am I Addicted?

If you have any of the following, you may be physically and/or psychologically addicted to a drug:

- You find you need to take more and more of the drug to have the same effect (tolerance)
- You find yourself becoming preoccupied with the drug—when you will next take it, how it will feel, how much you will take—and looking forward to it
- You no longer have interest or enthusiasm for things which you once enjoyed
- You continue to use the drug even though it is causing problems in your life and relationships
- You have tried to give up using the drug, but have not been able to succeed in the long term
- You suffer from withdrawal symptoms or unpleasant feelings when you have been off the drug for a while

Generally speaking, however, if you suspect that you are addicted, then you probably are, and you will need help to bring normality back into your life.

Prescription Drugs

In the early sixties big drug companies such as Roche and Wyeth developed a new "miracle drug". Known as benzodiazepines this group of drugs dampens down activity in the brain and are highly effective in treating acute anxiety.

Doctors started expressing concerns about these drugs when they found that patients experienced withdrawal effects when they tried to stop taking them. These were similar to the withdrawal symptoms of alcoholics and drug addicts and included delirium tremens (a state of confusion with trembling and hallucinations), sleeplessness and intense anxiety. Since the drugs had originally been prescribed for anxiety many doctors assumed that these effects were a return of the original symptoms caused by stopping the medication and simply prescribed the tranquiliser. Hence there were - and still are - many patients regularly taking benzos just to prevent withdrawal. There are still occasions however

where benzodiazepines are still the most effective treatment. These include a life threatening condition called status epilepticus (repeated seizures), severe disabling anxiety and acute insomnia. In such situations they should be prescribed in the lowest possible dose for no more than four weeks.

Benzos have side effects, particularly in long-term use. Perhaps the most harmful of these is the feeling of being in a daze or emotionally anaesthetised - tranquilised. Many who do successfully come off them say it is like waking up and finding a chunk of their lives gone.

Almost all drugs are potentially physically or psychologically addictive. Whenever you are prescribed a medicine ask your doctor whether it is addictive, whether it has side effects or contraindications, whether it can be taken with any condition or medication you already have and how long you will need to take it for. Most GPs are well aware of the dangers of benzos but there are still some, particularly older GPs, who may prescribe them without warning you of the dangers. If you find that you have been prescribed benzodiazepines, ask whether an alternative drug might be ask effective.

Some brand names of benzodiazepines to look out for are;

- Valium (Diazepam)
- Librium (Chlordiazepoxide)
- Mogadon (Nitrazepam)
- Ativan (Lorazepam)
- Oxazepam
- Loprazolam
- Temazepam

Addiction to legal painkillers is also extremely common, with more people seeking help for this than for heroin addiction. Patients experiencing chronic, long-term pain may find that they need to take more and more of their prescribed or over-the-counter painkiller to achieve relief, and can soon find that in addition to their pain, they experience withdrawal symptoms if they do not keep a baseline of the drug in their system. If this is a problem for you, seek help from your GP.

Getting Help

Drug addiction is a medical issue and your first port of call should be your GP. Treatment in an inpatient centre is available on the NHS although there is often a considerable waiting list. It is possible to be admitted to these centres privately, but can be expensive. Contact LawCare for further information about this.

Addiction, its effects and treatment are covered in greater details in LawCare's Alcohol pack, and much information—for example, the nature of denial, the twelve steps and sources of funding for treatment—relates equally to drugs. Call 01268 771333 for a copy, or see our website at www.lawcare.org.uk.

Further information and help is available from:

Narcotics Anonymous	8045 373 3366	www.ukna.org
National Drugs Helpline	0800 776600	www.talktofrank.com
LawCare	See front of this document for the number to call	