

## A rehab program just for lawyers

BY KAREN SLOAN

It's well documented that attorneys suffer from higher rates of depression and substance abuse than most other professions, and a recovery facility in Minnesota has launched a rehabilitation program specifically for legal professionals struggling with addiction.

Counselors at Hazelden — one of the largest and best known addiction treatment centers in the country, based in Center City, Minn. — believe their Legal Professionals Program is the first comprehensive in-patient program of its kind in the United States.

"We looked around when we started this, and didn't see anything like what we have created here," said program director Link Christin, who practiced law for more than 20 years before becoming an addiction counselor. "Lawyers are tremendously treatment resistant. They are nervous and cautious about committing to treatment and risking their reputations."

The characteristics often associated with being a good lawyer — such as being a strong problem solver — can dissuade lawyers from asking for help.

Hazelden has 180 beds, but only about 50 attorneys come through the general program each year, Christin said. He is hopeful that the



**HAZELDEN'S LEGAL PROFESSIONALS  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR LINK CHRISTIN**

new program will encourage more attorneys to seek help.

One key to the new program is the counselors running it: Three of them are lawyers turned addiction specialists.

The Legal Professionals Program incorporates the typical month-long inpatient Hazelden program with several added elements specifically for lawyers, Christin said. Lawyer-patients meet several times individually with the counselor-lawyers, and they also meet each week for group sessions with other patients who are lawyers. They also attend an outside, all-lawyer 12-step meeting in the Twin Cities. Volunteers from the area's local Lawyers Helping Lawyers program also visit Hazelden to offer counseling.

Once attorney-patients leave Hazelden, the program offers career restoration assistance such as writing letters to the bar on behalf of clients and helping them get their practices back in order. "We want to make sure they get help after they leave," Christin said.

Stepping away from the outside world and their practices in order to focus on recovery is difficult for lawyers, but it's also important to success.

"We think this program lets lawyers put all their energy and attention into their treatment," he said. "They often come here with lots of career concerns, and we don't want them to be distracted by that during treatment."

Christin himself struggled with an addiction to alcohol when he was a practicing lawyer. He decided at age 50 to seek treatment, and later began counseling others through lawyer assistance programs in Virginia and Minnesota.

"I liked doing it so much that I wanted to make this my second career," he said.

*Karen Sloan can be contacted at [ksloan@alm.com](mailto:ksloan@alm.com).*