



MY OPINION

BY NATALIE COBB KOEHLER

PRESIDENT, TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

Breaking the Silence

Filming began on Oct. 27 at the Texas Law Center on a very important Texas Young Lawyers Association project titled, *Breaking the Silence: A Path to Finding Mental Health*. This project is especially important to me as I lost a colleague in Meridian to suicide — not only was he a young lawyer, but he was also a very dear friend. I missed the signs that he was severely depressed, as did many of the other lawyers in our community.

After this experience, I knew when I began my year as president that one of my initiatives would be a mental health project. My goal was to develop a series of podcasts that could be accessed in the privacy of one's own home. These podcasts will help young lawyers and the community access information on mental health issues while providing resources on topics people might otherwise be embarrassed to discuss in public.

The podcasts for *Breaking the Silence* air online this month through the TYLA website (tyla.org) and more videos will be added as the bar year progresses. The videos feature doctors and health professionals providing advice on various topics including obsessive-compulsive disorder, cutting disorders, alcohol addiction, prescription drug abuse, eating disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and psychosis, and suicide awareness and prevention.

One component of this project will also involve a series on dealing with a colleague or family member who suffers from mental illness. There are many resources targeted at people who suffer, but not many resources for the people living with those who suffer. TYLA

hopes to help people learn how to spot the signs of depression and mental illness and give tips on how best to deal with these issues.

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In the spirit of helping families, TYLA will pair *Breaking the Silence* with our 2007 publication, *Committed to Healing: Involuntary Commitment Procedures*, which outlines the steps involved in an Emergency Detention Order. This was one of the projects I worked on when I first became a director on the TYLA board after one too many clients had come into my office seeking assistance for their own family members. I am looking forward to spreading the word about both of these projects, especially in these economic times that often cause even more stress and depression than normal.

While mental health is a fairly new initiative for TYLA, the State Bar has been helping address these issues in the legal

community for years through the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program. TLAP provides confidential help for lawyers, law students, and judges who have problems with substance abuse and/or mental health issues. For more information on TLAP, visit texasbar.com/tlap. *Breaking the Silence* is the first time that TYLA has worked with TLAP and its director, **Ann Foster**. We hope that this project helps create a lasting partnership and we cannot thank Ann enough for her help in developing these podcasts.

Many agencies, attorneys, and health professionals donated their time to this project and assisted us in lining up professionals to appear in the podcasts, including Devereaux, a mental health facility in Victoria and League City, and Texas Access to Justice Commission staff attorney **Melissa Cook**. We are so thankful for these doctors, health professionals, and agencies donating their time to help us with these important messages.

Finally, special thanks also goes to the executive committee advisor for the Access to Justice Committee, **Kristy Piazza**, and the entire *Breaking the Silence* team: **Kim Smith** of Plano, **Erin O'Driscoll** of Houston, **Dustin Howell** of Austin, **Clint Harbour** of Austin, **Sam Houston** of San Antonio, **Lance Currie** of Dallas, **Robert Booth** of Galveston, and **Rebekah Brooker** of Dallas.

To **Brad Newsom**, my friend and colleague, this project is done in your memory. You are greatly missed and I can only hope that this project will help other lawyers break the silence about issues they face and seek the help they need to overcome their internal struggles. ☘