



# IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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## AT RISK

Gambling, and solicitations to gamble, have become common features of the consumer landscape. On TV, you can watch celebrities playing poker and see advertisements enticing you to gamble at a local casino. When you turn on your computer, you are likely to get pop-ups inviting you to wager and links to online gambling sites. If you walk into a neighborhood restaurant or tavern, you may hear the music of video poker and slot machines playing in the background. As you drive down the street, the ubiquitous crossed fingers of the state lottery signs beckon you to try your “luck.”

Over 70% of U.S. adults report having gambled at least once in the past year. According to recent statistics of the Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregonians spend over 1 billion dollars a year on all forms of gambling. While many gamble for fun and recreation, more than 2% of adult gamblers in Oregon become problem or pathological gamblers. These individuals experience major disruptions to their personal and professional lives, as the risk-taking of gambling progresses to the maladaptive behaviors of an addiction.

A problem gambler is defined as anyone who is experiencing financial, psychological, emotional, legal, relationship, or other difficulties related to gambling. Problem gambling may progress to pathological gambling with symptoms that include: a preoccupation with gambling and urges to gamble; gambling to escape from problems or to relieve moods (stress, anxiety, guilt, depression); inability to control or stop gambling; restlessness or irritability

when attempting to cut back or stop gambling; continued gambling to “win back” gambling losses; and lying to others about the extent of gambling.

Who is at risk of becoming a problem pathological gambler? Some gamblers share traits that predispose them to developing problem gambling. They are often highly intelligent, imaginative, competitive, impulsive, impatient, and easily bored. Rigid thinking, perfectionism, low self-esteem, isolation, and depression also characterize this group. These gamblers experience a sense of uniqueness and an active fantasy life that contribute to their enjoyment of on-the-edge, risk-taking behavior while inhibiting their ability to cope with daily stressors.

Lawyers may be at increased risk for problem gambling. Many possess personality traits that, while contributing to professional success, increase their vulnerability to addictive behaviors. Lawyers often obtain validation and reward in the workplace for being competitive, perfectionistic, in control, highly responsible, and willing to work long hours. Such high-achiever behaviors may create a life that is out of balance, with personal and relationship needs being given less time and attention than the challenges of the job.

While trained to deal with the legal problems of others, lawyers may have difficulty identifying and addressing their own personal issues. This lack of self-awareness can increase a sense of isolation, powerlessness, and depression while decreasing the ability to cope with stressors, share concerns, or seek help from others. The escape behavior of gam-

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bling may appear to provide a temporary relief from ongoing personal and professional pressures. However, it puts the individual at greater risk for developing a gambling problem and for experiencing the additional stress and pain of uncontrolled gambling and its consequences.

Problem gamblers typically fall into two general types. *Action* gamblers prefer skill games, such as poker, dice, horse racing, and sports betting. They often believe that they are smart enough to beat the odds and may enjoy the fantasy of being a high roller. *Escape* gamblers prefer hypnotic games, such as bingo, video poker, and slots and may seek the numbing effects of these forms of gambling. Lawyers and other professionals often prefer *action* gambling – sports betting, playing the stock market, and high-volume day trading, as well as easily accessible Internet gambling.

Although no substance is ingested, the problem gambler experiences a high from gambling that is similar to the mood-altering effects of cocaine use. Changes in the brain occur from repeated gambling and compel the gambler to keep on gambling. As with drug or alcohol use, tolerance develops. The gambler seeks to recreate the rush of the gambling experience and increases his or her gambling, despite losses and other negative consequences. The problem gambler feels urges to gamble, with less and less ability to resist the craving for more and more gambling. When gambling activity ends, the gambler may go through a period of withdrawal and experience emotional and physical effects that trigger a repetition of the gambling cycle.

All gamblers need money to gamble. Problem gamblers need increasing amounts of cash to finance gambling, pay gambling debts, and “chase” gambling losses. Lawyers who gamble are particularly vulnerable to escalated gambling because they may have access to client funds. They may hold or manage large sums of money belonging to their clients, such as trusts or settlements. A desperate lawyer may be tempted to “borrow” money from clients, intending to “pay it back” with gambling “winnings.” This violation of client trust and professional integrity can be devastating for both client and gambler. Lawyers who face gambling-related disciplinary actions are likely to be perma-

nently disbarred.

The high-risk behavior of continued gambling may progress to a “hidden” addiction, as it is not easy for others to detect – even when it occurs in the workplace. Although out-of-control gamblers may work hard to maintain a professional image and a good front, they experience much pain, shame, and remorse. Pathological gambling affects personal life and professional status, with potentially disastrous consequences for the gambler, the gambler’s family, and others. How do you know if gambling is a problem? The series of questions used by the National Council on Problem Gambling as an initial screening tool is listed in the sidebar on page 2. If you or someone you know answers “yes” to any of these questions, consider seeking professional assistance.

The Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) can provide you with more information about problem gambling and referrals to gambling treatment providers. The OAAP is completely confidential and free. If you are concerned about your gambling or if you know someone who is at risk, call the OAAP attorney counselors at 503-226-1057 or 800-321-6227 for assistance.

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