

Physician Illness/ Recovery

Seth B. did everything to the max. He studied hard to get into an orthopedic residency and impressed the staff with his dedication and knowledge base. He partied hard, easily consuming 10-12 drinks during a night downtown, and didn't really have much problem the next day. Friends envied him. His Mother sometimes expressed concern in her voice and sometimes reminded him that his Uncle Frank (her brother) died from a serious drinking problem. In early days, Seth had no problems confining his drinking to the weekends and holidays and it did not cause him any problems.

Seth finished residency and decided to set up shop in St. James for his orthopedic practice. He married Angela, a friend of Wavey's, the same year and life was looking good. Before long their first born, Michael, came on the scene. Emily followed within 18 months and Seth junior within three years. Seth was "knee deep" in his clinical responsibilities throughout this time but managed to get an afternoon away when his wife came home with the babies. He was a very proud father and with 3 children, they were now complete.

Shortly after moving to the town of St. James, Seth and Cindy had joined a dinner club. The four couples got together every couple of months in someone's house to eat a gourmet meal and drink some fine wine. The evening usually started with two to three drinks followed by copious amounts of wine with dinner and liqueurs for desert. Seth rarely drove home after these nights as he was unable to do so safely. This would sometimes cause friction with Angela as the constant designated driver and one who got up with the kids the next morning. They had their first fight the morning after a particularly booze- filled night.

As time went on, Seth's drinking continued to escalate. Each night he wasn't on call he would come home, have a few before dinner, and sometimes preferring another drink instead of eating. This upset Angela and the fighting escalated. Seth began having problems sleeping, felt sweaty and agitated many nights, and tossed and turned. He was nauseated in the mornings and didn't remember ever feeling this sick. He decided to talk to his dinner friend and colleague who was a family GP. He requested and was prescribed Temazepam at night.

Seth began drinking on a daily basis when he could. He started taking the Temazepam in the evening because his nerves were bad and shortly after began to black out after only a couple of drinks. He managed to perform his clinical duties but it was becoming quite burdensome. Call days seemed endless and he had very little patience with the nursing staff and students. He seemed to be always on edge, his weight increased significantly and he was out of shape for the first time in his life. As his anxiety increased and he became depressed, the drinking got worse. The arguments at home increased and Cindy was forced to take the children and go to her mother's place. Seth was now alone and drinking more than ever.

He had tried to stop for a couple of years with no effect. He found that he would begin thinking about drinking around mid day and the thought was so powerful he could only get relief by giving in. It didn't

matter now if he was on call or not on call, if it was morning, noon or night – he had to drink. One day in the operating room he received a call from the Medical Director who had received a call from the College of Physicians – one of his colleagues had reported his drinking on the job and he was told to stop working and go home. Seth should have been upset, but he was strangely relieved. He knew what this meant for his career, but he also knew that maybe now he could get some help for his problem.

The next morning Seth met with the administration who put him in touch with the Physician Health Program (PHP). The doctor he spoke with sounded encouraging and arranged for Seth to get the help he needed and now wanted. Seth spent the next month in a treatment centre which catered to physicians and other health professionals. He was flabbergasted at the extent of the problem of addiction among his colleagues. For the first time in a long time he felt hopeful. He knew that there would be a long road back to recovery, but he felt that with help he could do it – he had not felt hopeful in a very long time.