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Currently Dr. Snipes serves as the Chief Executive Officer and Clinical Director for Dawn-Elise Enterprises, Inc. which has grown over the past few years to include three companies: Affordable Wellness, The Addictions Counseling Alliance and Police-Counseling.com. In addition to her private practice, she has worked for two years as the Clinical Director of a large multi-level substance abuse and mental health treatment facility in Gainesville, Florida.

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*PBA wishes to express appreciation to Dr. Snipes for contributing this helpful column for the benefit of our members.*

# A Public Service Column for Members: A Look At Wellness

## Problem Solving Courts

Okay, it seemed like an oxymoron to me too when I first heard it, but these courts have merit. Currently there are over 2000 problem solving courts (drug court, mental health court, domestic violence court) in the United States, and nearly all of them are showing positive outcomes including reductions in recidivism and costs associated with incarceration. They have begun to bridge the gap between mental health and addictions treatment, case management, vocational services and the legal system. They target offenders early in their "career," and provide a holistic approach to help them break the cycle of addiction.

Drug court programs use counselors and case managers to assist participants in getting treatment for their mental health and addiction issues, finding a job, maintaining housing and developing a clean and sober support system. Any of these issues, left unattended, can lead a person back to using and/or dealing drugs. Think about it, when people are depressed, or stressed out they often drink. When people are unemployed, they often are stressed, depressed and bored... a trifecta. When they are homeless, they may be depressed and often find themselves around people who are using. And... drum roll please... when all of their friends, family and "associates" use or deal, well, it is gonna be hard to stay clean. Most people who are involved in drug court come from families with a long history of addiction—drugs, gambling, alcohol, sex, work—the type of addiction does not really matter. What matters is that drug courts have the ability to break the cycle. It targets people relatively early in their addiction, addresses all of their problems, and supports them through the challenges of a complete lifestyle overhaul.

Two of the biggest obstacles I faced working with addicted offenders was keeping them engaged in treatment long enough to have an effect and getting them employed. Research has shown repeatedly that it takes at least 90 days of treatment to really acquire any lasting gains. It is kind of like learning football. First you become interested in it and learn about it. Then you learn the basic skills—passing, blocking, err...uhhhh...and all that other stuff. Once you have mastered the basics, then you can start using them in the game. Treatment is similar. The first 30 days is really an extended detox. Hopefully people are at least toying with the idea of sobriety. During the second 30 days, the fog is lifting and people are learning about their problem(s) and how to live a clean and sober life. It is not until the last 30 days that people really even begin to internalize the changes. Drug courts have the ability to impose rewards and sanctions which help participants stay in treatment, stay clean and "do the next right thing." But sanctions are not all there is to it.

For example, John enters the program, gets and maintains a job, finds stable housing and enters treatment. This means that not only is he **not** getting three hot's and a cot on the state's dime, but he **is** being a productive member of the community, staying busy (and thus out of

trouble) and earning wages which may be needed to pay his rent, child support, court costs and restitution. Just like the ripples when you throw a pebble in the water, John's positive actions in the program have far-reaching effects. On top of the obvious, John is also breaking the cycle of addiction in his family, so future generations will not come through the system.

Prior to drug courts, much of this would have been difficult. John may not have wanted to get sober. Not all participants entering drug courts want to get sober either. They may just want to stay out of jail or keep their kids. That is okay. Whatever the hook, you have them. Early in the process it is important to help participants see how the program is helping them meet **their** goals. This provides a lot of leverage when you have to nudge them to do something they don't want to, such as taking a minimum wage job or participating in treatment. By working with the judge and probation officer, it is possible to provide rewards (and sanctions) that are meaningful to that person. For example, three days in jail may not really be a punishment for some participants, but increasing their daily obligations to the program (i.e. more treatment, community service etc.) may have an impact. This is where open communication between team members facilitates success. The judge may not know

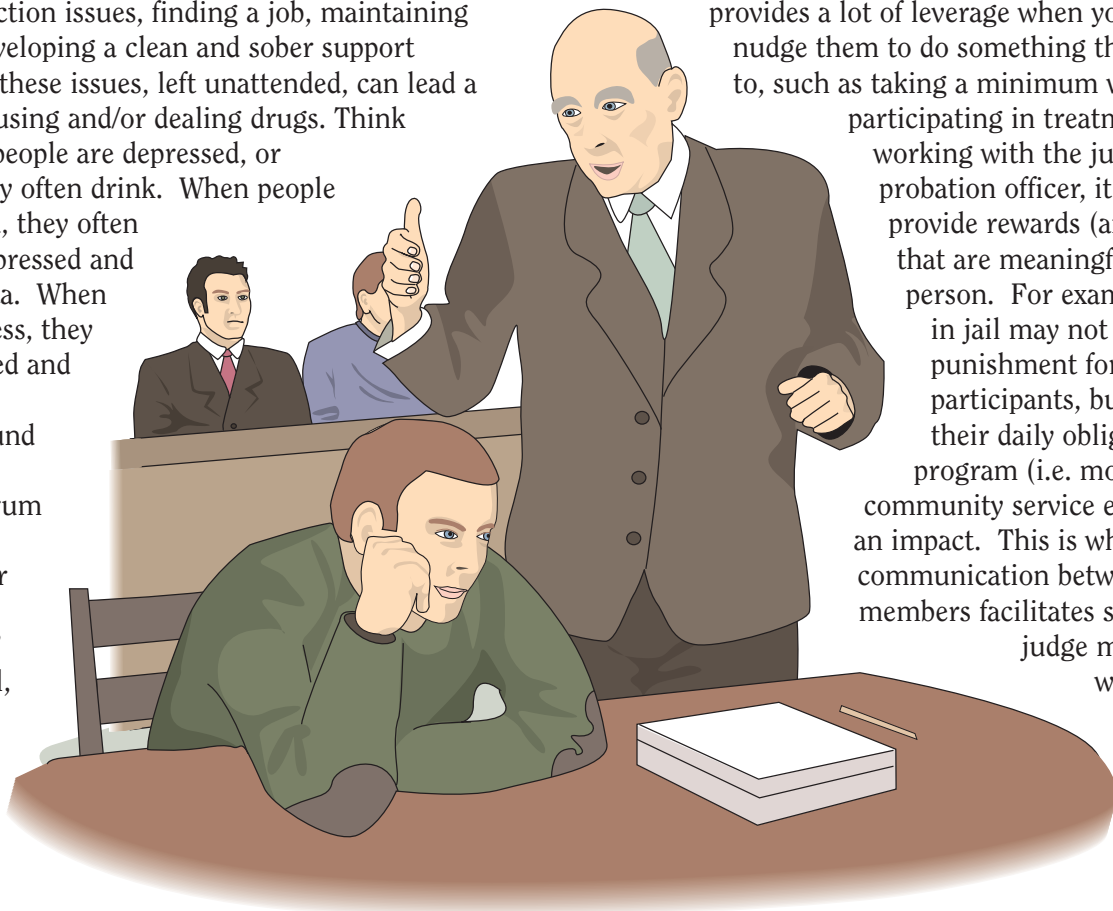
what motivates a particular client, but the counselor will.

Likewise, a counselor and probation officer have no direct ability

to impose sanctions, but the judge does.

Drug courts have developed quite a bit since their inception, and they continue to identify issues that need to be addressed in order to increase their effectiveness. Current issues being dealt with include gender and cultural sensitivity in the drug court system, working with offenders on Methadone and increasing accessibility to drug court programs for offenders in rural communities. May is National Drug Court Month. You can find more information on a range of topics online at the National Drug Court Institute ([www.ndci.org](http://www.ndci.org)); the National Association of Drug Court Professionals ([www.nadcp.org](http://www.nadcp.org)); and [AllCEUs.com](http://AllCEUs.com).

AllCEUs.com is hosting free webcasts on substance abuse treatment related topics each Wednesday. People can go to <http://allceus.com/webinars.html> and click on the link to watch/participate. They can also watch our prerecorded presentations at [www.allceus.blip.tv](http://www.allceus.blip.tv). 🎧



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