

# Pathological Gambling and Attorneys

## Consider these questions:

*Do you or does someone you know:*

1. Lose time from work or experience problems due to gambling?
2. Arrive late for meetings or hearings with clients or colleagues because of gambling related activities (e.g. need to place a bet, check latest point spread or stock market trading activities)?
3. Gamble to pay debts or solve financial problems?
4. Hide betting slips, lottery tickets, or other signs of gambling from family members, colleagues or supervisors?
5. Borrow money from clients, co-workers, trust funds or other means to gamble?
6. Argue with a spouse or partner regarding gambling?
7. Experience difficulty sleeping due to gambling?
8. Become restless or irritable when trying to cut down, control or stop gambling?
9. Gamble as a way to escape stress, professional or personal problems?
10. Lie to family members, friends or colleagues about how much money or time is spent gambling or the amount of money lost?
11. Continue to gamble to recoup losses from previous bets?
12. Contemplate self-destructive thoughts due to gambling?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” gambling may be a problem. The first step to getting help is to admit there is a problem. For confidential information about our Impaired Professional Program and assistance, call the FCCG Problem Gambling 24-hour HelpLine:

**888-ADMIT-IT**

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## The Hidden Addiction

By Paul Ashe, Esq., President, FCCG Board of Directors

Much has been written about alcoholism and drug addiction among the professions. Each of us, as attorneys, can probably think of several colleagues who struggle with addiction and its consequences: petitions and pleadings that were never filed, missed court dates, questionable fiduciary decisions, irate clients complaining to partners. We know it is a serious problem; we also know how to identify and treat those addictions. On the other hand, we know far less about what has been termed the “hidden addiction” – *compulsive gambling*.

Pathological (compulsive) gambling is a devastating addiction that robs the individual of any power to make responsible choices around spending either money or time. Driven by an uncontrollable urge to gamble, the compulsive gambler loses everything: home, family, livelihood – and often their lives. Compulsive gamblers also have a higher rate of suicidal ideation and attempts than persons suffering from other addictive disorders. For professionals like attorneys and those who handle the money decisions of others, there is the additional concern of criminal behavior arising from problem gambling activities, or at the very least, ethical and fiduciary violations. When personal assets and credit have been exhausted, the compulsive gambler may turn to illegal activity to secure the cash to continue gambling.

Unlike addiction to alcohol and drugs, gambling does not have physical symptoms, such as slurred speech or stumbling. Yet, like alcoholism and substance abuse, pathological gambling does not discriminate; it affects people from all walks of life. Recent research has shown that professionals, such as lawyers, doctors and accountants, who typically have control over their own schedule and timetables, are at greater risk for developing a gambling problem. Some of the forms of gambling seen with growing frequency are casino, sports, Internet and stock market gambling. For instance, lawyers that aggressively pursue day trading are often pathological gamblers driven by the challenge, competition and thrill of this fast-paced market activity. Even if only a traditional stock market investor, a lawyer may be preoccupied with the status of investments, running trading trailers on their office computers throughout the day, and talking about the market at every opportunity.

Why the special concern for professionals? Like alcoholics and drug addicts who require alcohol or their substance in order to get their “fix,” compulsive gamblers have a dire need to access money, in effect their “drug of choice.” As access to money grows limited, gamblers often resort to taking or “borrowing” from others, believing it is a temporary loan that will be repaid when they win. This can be devastating to a family, partnership or firm as savings, home equity, business and liquid assets rapidly disappear. Yet, once those assets have been depleted, the gambler will not necessarily stop the behavior. They will simply look for other sources for their “drug.”

Since professionals find it extremely challenging and potentially detrimental to their careers to participate in traditional self-help and mainstream treatment programs, the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling has developed an Impaired Professionals Program. This program consists of confidential resources and referrals from a wide range of trained experts. To further assure confidentiality, the agency works closely with professional organizations, such as the Florida Bar Association, Florida Lawyers Assistance, Inc. and the Florida Medical Association and is constantly seeking to expand this network.

For additional information about the FCCG’s Impaired Professional Program, call our 24-hour confidential Problem Gambling HelpLine (**888-ADMIT-IT**) or visit us on line at [www.gamblinghelp.org](http://www.gamblinghelp.org) — click “About FCCG,” then “Programs and Services,” to review the Impaired Professionals section.