



The Legal Guardian

with David Givot

No more hiding: I am a caregiver with depression

Acknowledging my depression to family, friends and colleagues and getting help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of resilience and strength

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Robin Williams. Kate Spade. Anthony Bourdain. Chester Bennington. Media attention on celebrity suicides puts a spotlight on the issue of suicide and the depression that underlies it. But their struggle is no more severe or real for them than the [struggle faced by countless veterans and EMS providers](#) every single day; sufferers who don't make the news, yet who are infinitely more important to the fabric of our society.

Celebrity suicides always spark a brief flood of social media memes warning that depression is serious; depression is real; depression is this, that and the other thing. With the best of intentions, the memes are shared by millions of people whose own social media presence delivers the appearance of a blissful, trouble-free life full of interesting meals, jovial friends and wild adventures. The most troubling irony is that many of these same people also suffer from depression and hide behind appearances, afraid their secret pain will be exposed.

Even as I write this, the apprehension is nearly paralyzing because, for as long as I can remember, I have suffered under the weight and in the darkness of depression. Until now, it was known only to my wife, my daughter and my closest confidantes. It's time to stop hiding and start healing.

FUNCTIONAL DEPRESSION IN EMS

I don't know for sure when my own battle started; I don't even know when I gave it enough attention to call it a battle. Was it when my mother died? I was only six at the time. Was it when, as an EMS

provider, I figured out that [not everyone can be saved](#)? Or when I finally saw, in real life, how absolutely terrible people could be? Or has it always been there? It could have been triggered any one of a million reasons.

Nevertheless, for years, I struggled in secret. When people were looking, I was always the funny guy, the envelope pusher, the guy who always served to make others smile. The public face – the front – was easy. But when nobody was looking, it was just me; quiet, tired, sometimes sad, but usually just down. While I never entertained thoughts of ending my own pain, I can see how others do. It can be tiresome to live as different characters, not always knowing which one is real. So, for a long time, I just balanced as best I could and nobody outside the inner circle ever knew – and even they didn't always know.

Over time, being functionally depressed becomes a way of life, something to which we just grow accustomed. We get so used to it that we don't really notice anymore. We just live with it. That must be when depression, a most vindictive interloper, takes it up a notch.

LOSS AND DEPRESSION

Maybe you have noticed that [The Legal Guardian](#) has been silent for over a year. There is a reason.

About a year ago, [cancer took my father](#) only 10 weeks after his diagnosis. At 90, he had lived a good, long life and was ready to go. For me, though, from the time of my mother's death 43 years earlier, he was the one and only constant in my life; always there from day one with unconditional support and an unlimited supply of love. When he retired at 80, he moved in with my wife, daughter, mother-in-law and me, and was with us, in our home as family should be, until he drew his final breath.

Even now, a world without my father seems surreal. Nevertheless, I did as humans do: I retreated, I grieved, I experienced the stages. The subsequent days and weeks were harder than I had imagined, but they were normal.

After a while, though, what had been "grieving behavior" became my daily routine. I was not perpetually sad – that's not what depression is. More than ever before, I was tired all the time. I had lost interest in most activities. I was eating whatever, whenever. I was easily irritated. Despite wanting to do not much more than sleep, I couldn't sleep. I had developed chronic back pain that even an MRI could not diagnose. These were the individual signs and symptoms of depression I had battled for years, and now I was experiencing them all at the same time and they were not going away.

I was no longer able to hide what I was dealing with from my family and those closest to me. More than anyone, my wife knew that, if she couldn't find me in my home office, my work for the day was done and I was in our room binge-watching something on the television, anything to get away from the noise of life. On stage, in court, in public and on social media, I remained in character: high energy and high efficiency, just another terrific day. Back stage, away from where you could see me, where only my family and closest friends could see, nothing: an empty shell. That's no way to exist and it certainly is not living.

DEPRESSION: A BATTLE WORTH FIGHTING

Depression is, no doubt, a battle I will fight forever, but it is a fight worth fighting. That is why I have chosen to step out of the dark and into the light with it. I'm not seeking your sympathy or approval (although both are certainly appreciated), I am writing so that you will know you are not alone.

Inasmuch as depression is the product of a wide variety of causes, environmental, situational, and, as it is for me, organic, it is nothing of which to be ashamed and it is nothing to fear or hide. I see depression as being like the ocean: it is enormous, dangerous, and can be unpredictable. But, if you respect it and understand it, with help, it can be perfectly safe to navigate.

EMS providers are taught early on in their career [to be tough, stoic and resilient](#). To be effective, we must be all those things. But, above all, we are human, and humans are inherently vulnerable.

If you have read this far, it is because this column has struck a chord. You may be feeling some or all of the symptoms I have described. You may even be thinking terrible and uncomfortable thoughts as a result. It's ok. It's normal. It's human.

For me, medication was not the answer and counseling, while very helpful, was not enough. For me, finally talking about it, owning it, facing it head on and saying "I'm not afraid of you!" seems to be the missing piece and it is, at best, a work in progress.

After years on the ambulance, my existence now is built on my commitment to keeping EMS providers safe from the things that would cause their career and their patients harm and that does not always mean from the law.

Today I come, not as a paramedic or even a lawyer, but as a human with a simple and very important message: depression is real. It is human, it is not going to just go away and it is manageable. Acknowledging that and getting help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of resilience and strength, and, if nothing else, we are strong.

About the author

David Givot, Esq., graduated from the UCLA Center for Prehospital Care (formerly DFH) in June 1989 and spent most of the next decade working as a Paramedic responding to 911 in Glendale, CA, with the (then BLS only) fire department. By the end of 1998, he was traveling around the country working with distressed EMS agencies teaching improved field provider performance through better communication and leadership practices. David then moved into the position of director of operations for the largest ambulance provider in the Maryland. Now, back in Los Angeles, he has earned his law degree and is a practicing Defense Attorney still looking to the future of EMS. In addition to defending EMS Providers, both on the job and off, he has created [TheLegalGuardian.com](#) as a vital step toward improving the state of EMS through information and education designed to protect EMS professionals - and agencies - nationwide. David is a member of the [EMS1 Editorial Advisory Board](#). David can be contacted via e-mail at david.givot@ems1.com.

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