

Legal Eagle

'Don't sign blank or incomprehensible documents'

Altaf spends more time on educating clients on law

By Valiya S. Sajjad
Arab Times Staff

Lawyer Altaf Hussein has over 5 years experience practicing in Kuwait and handles a variety of cases including release and sponsorship issues to dud cheques and corporate cheating.

He is practicing with Tareq & Abeer Legal Services and is happy to be working in Kuwait. "It is not like working in a foreign country," Altaf feels, because all his clients are compatriots from different walks of life. Through his profession, Altaf gets to see many sides of life, and has been able to fully appreciate the realities of expatriate life.

"I am able to help many people who end up on the wrong side of the law because of ignorance or because they get defrauded by someone. Altaf is confident that with due legal assistance a lot of people in the jails can be set free.

Business

Altaf's law firm also serves many corporate clients, and from his colleagues he has come to understand much about the legal aspects of doing business in Kuwait.

Altaf hails from the southern Indian state of Kerala, and was actively involved in politics during his college days. Campus politics is fervent in Kerala, and Altaf, rather uniquely, does

not belong to any party. 'I always go by issues.'

Law and politics are closely interconnected, Altaf notes. 'Both are there to serve the people and put life in order. The judiciary and the executive powers of a state must act as checks and balances to maintain harmony.'

Rights

At college level politics, Altaf had been a very vociferous campaigner for human rights and environment. 'Waste disposal is turning into a huge issue all over the world, with some first world countries using the third world countries like dumps.' Altaf cited the example of the ship at Cochin harbor caught with tons of waste.

Talking about Kuwait, Altaf said it's a wonderful country, blessed in all respects. The leadership here really cares for the people, and they do so much not just for the citizens but also expatriates. 'I know people who have been living here for more than half a century and don't ever want to leave.'

'It's sad that a few lapses are pointed out to undermine the entire country by some people. That is not fair. We should learn to count our blessings, and be grateful for that.'

Challenge

Altaf spends a good deal of time educating clients on law. 'Most of them are ignorant of even the very basics such as not to sign a blank document. The prac-

tice of making employees sign blank documents is quite common here. And most employees do so without questioning, and they are afraid to challenge their employers in any way.'

By signing a blank document, one is in fact pledging one's life at the mercy of the employer. Altaf has on many occasions gone to court to save clients facing false charges by their employers who don't want to give release to their employees.

Another issue is that of signing documents that are incomprehensible. "Don't sign documents that are in Arabic if you can't read them. This is same as signing a blank document."

One of the most memorable cases of

Altaf in his short experience in Kuwait had to do with a wife, who wanted to sue her husband because he was refusing to take another wife. 'The couple had no children, and medical treatment was to no avail. The husband was the only child to his parents, and if he went childless his lineage would end with him.'

Altaf was very shocked when the wife approached him seeking legal recourse to force her husband to marry again. On enquiry, he came to know that she was acting under the duress of her in-laws, and was not actually gone to the idea. Altaf advised her that law cannot force a man to marry against his wishes, no matter what the facts are.



Photos courtesy of 'Failaka Island: The Ikaros of the Arabian Gulf' book by Jehan Sayid Rajab

A small shoo'a'i with a sail and oars used for fishing around the island of Failaka. They were usually built on the island itself.

Alternative Medicine

Sweeteners tied to side-effect risk

Sugar alternatives do not aid in weight loss

By Mia Ponzio
Special to the Arab Times

People are always looking for a substitute for sugar. Over the years there have been many different sugar alternatives on the market. Some of them are saccharin (going by brand names like Sweet and Low), aspartame (going by brand names like NutraSweet, Equal, and Canderel), sugar alcohols (there are many, going by many different names and brands), and, more recently sucralose (going by brand names such as Splenda). The funny thing is that, since these various artificial sweeteners came out (and yes, Splenda is artificial, too, no matter what the advertisements say), people have just been getting fatter and fatter! So what's the deal?

Well, after much scientific research, the consensus is starting to become clear. What it looks like is that using artificial sweeteners is a major factor that is clearly shown with obesity. It seems, the more we use, the more we gain weight! How strange! Apparently, the body detects the sweetness of the artificial sugar and reacts to it as if it were regular sugar. But, as of yet, no one really knows what the exact causal factor is. They know, though, that there is a correlation.

Problem

So, why is sucralose (that goes by the brand name Splenda, among others) so bad. The company that makes it claims that it can't be bad because it is made of sugar itself. Well, while this is true, the problem with it is that, during the manufacturing process, it changes so much that it becomes something completely different. If you read what Dr Mercola has to say about sucralose, you will find that he states that it is only one molecule away from DDT (which is a dangerous pesticide).

The research on sucralose, specifically, seems to show that the use of sucralose can detrimentally affect the liver, the spleen, the kidneys, and even can shrink the size of the thymus gland (which is important for the immune system). Other studies even show that sucralose may increase the appetite, which is exactly the opposite of the desired effect.

There is more research that was done with sucralose that showed a clear detrimental effect on the digestive bacteria, showing clearly that up to 50% of the good bacteria that we all have in our intestines is actually destroyed by the use of sucralose.

Studies

Further research on the safety of sucralose done in animal studies showed that there were several serious problems with the use of

sucralose, including potential anemia, the miscarriage of pregnant animals, and even death! While no studies have been done in humans (that is strange, too) plenty have been done with animals, and the negatives seem to clearly outweigh the positives, for sure.

There is also empirical evidence that shows that many people have serious side effects from using sucralose. Symptoms including skin problems, severe headaches, allergic type reactions, sometimes serious digestive reactions, heart palpitations, neurological type reactions, breathing problems, swellings in various areas of the body, joint pain, and more, show up.

With all this evidence, why on earth would anything want to take such risks by using sucralose? Originally, everyone thought that sucralose was quite safe, including me, but personally, using Splenda has never done anything to help me lose weight, that's for sure. And I, for one, am definitely not going to be using it any more for anything.

Natural

Eating sugary foods is no answer either, so it's much better to get your sweetness from wholesome natural, preferably organic fruit. Take the step toward going as natural as possible right now.

Obviously, the use or not of Splenda or any of the other artificial sweeteners is a personal choice. If you are willing to take the risk, then, by all means, use them. I, personally, have opted not to, and I drink nothing but water and herbal teas now. No need to fill my body with potential problems.

If you are still on the fence about the issue, go and read more about it. You can never lose anything by learning more before you jump, right? Don't be quick to listen to the advertising, because advertising is meant to convince people to buy something. The manufacturers want to sell their product. They don't care much if they have to stretch the truth a bit in order to accomplish their sales. But, we, as consumers, don't have to fall for every claim that they make. We need to be conscious consumers, and think before we buy.

Let's do whatever it takes to keep ourselves as healthy as possible. Eat completely natural foods whenever you can, and ward off illness with good wholesome foods of all kinds.

Email me: miaponzo@yahoo.com
Don't forget to visit us at: www.kuwaitliving.com for information on Kuwait and more!
Check out my health lenses on Squidoo also, www.squidoo.com/lensmasters/mia_ponzo

Medication safe, effective when used appropriately

Untreated ADHD may cause more harm

By Dr Nicholas Scull
Special to the Arab Times

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most commonly diagnosed mental health conditions among children in both Europe and the US, affecting approximately 5 to 7 percent of children and 2-5 percent of adults. A study of children in primary school in UAE found that about 14.9 percent of children met criteria for an ADHD diagnosis. Despite the high prevalence rates of ADHD, a great number of misconceptions about this medical condition exist. Here are some common questions regarding ADHD:

What is ADHD?
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a medical condition characterized by inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity, which occurs with both children and adults. People with ADHD have difficulty initiating and sustaining attention with tasks, often causing them to switch from one unfinished task to another. Consequently, people with ADHD often fail to complete their homework and work obligations. People with ADHD also tend to be highly distractible by things going on around them. They have difficulty shifting attention from one task or activity to another.

People with ADHD may also be excessively hyperactive in that they are fidgety or restless (e.g., bouncing legs, playing with fingers, tapping pencils). They may seem overly-talkative and frequently interrupt others. They may also be impulsive and have difficulty waiting their turn or seem generally impatient.

How do you get ADHD?
There are a lot of myths about how people get ADHD. Everything from sugar, food additives, poor parenting skills, bad education, and laziness have all been wrongly suggested at one time or another. The latest research has identified that ADHD is largely genetic. People with relatives who have the disorder

are more likely get it. In fact, ADHD is more heritable than intelligence and almost as inheritable as height. Moreover, ADHD appears to enact disturbances in specific neurotransmitter systems (chemicals in the brain) thus affecting specific areas of the brain. The part of the brain that seems to be most affected is the frontal lobe, which is the part of the brain that is generally responsible for planning, organization, impulse control, managing behavior, and problem solving (the very behaviors that ADHD impairs).

If someone has ADHD, does it mean that they are also less intelligent?

Just because someone has ADHD does not mean that she/he is less intelligent. In fact, people with ADHD are just as likely to have average level IQs as those without the disorder.

How do I know if I have ADHD?

ADHD is a very difficult condition to assess because the signs and symptoms can be caused by many other problems. For example, difficulty with attention and concentration can also occur when people are depressed, anxious, or if someone has a specific learning disability. Unfortunately, no single test exists that can determine if someone has the disorder. The best psychologists can do for now is conduct a series of diagnostic interviews with the person and those who know them well, cognitive and academic tests to determine areas of strength and weakness, and behavioral rating scales to determine if the presence of specific ADHD symptoms exist. This diagnostic process can provide a lot of useful information including whether or not someone appears to have ADHD. This testing



Scull

should only be done with a psychologist with appropriate training.

How is ADHD treated?

Let me start by saying what does not help ADHD. Dietary changes such as reduced sugar consumption and increased Omega-3, although potentially helpful nutritionally speaking, do not appear to have much, if any, effect on ADHD symptoms. Expensive biofeedback and brain/cognitive-enhancement computer software also have little to no scientific support in reducing ADHD symptoms. In fact, only three interventions appear to have some benefit:

1) Behavioral modification programs at home and school. These programs tend to be based on a token-economy system whereby positive behavior is rewarded and negative behavior is punished by removal of privileges.

2) Educational accommodations. Changes made in the child's school regarding behavioral management and academic accommodations (e.g., taking tests in a quiet room; breaking lengthy assignments into smaller units).

3) Medication. Research suggests that medication is probably the most effective intervention for reducing ADHD. In fact, people tend to have an immediate response to medication and it helps about 70 percent children who take it. Although all medication has potential side-effects which should be discussed with your doctor, ADHD medications tend to be safe and effective when used appropriately.

Don't ADHD medications increase the risk for substance abuse later in life?

It does not appear that ADHD medications increase the likelihood of substance abuse later in life. In fact, untreated (or under-treated) ADHD is a larger risk factor for substance abuse later in life. When ADHD is untreated, people tend to become discouraged with school and repeated failures and disappointments. They also tend to seek substances to "self-medicate" in misguided attempts to

help reduce symptoms themselves.

What should I do if I or someone I know has ADHD?

Although there is no cure for ADHD and people never truly "outgrow" the disorder, it is highly treatable. Here are some recommendations:

1) Contact a psychologist in your area to schedule an initial consultation. Get a recommendation for a psychologist from friends, family, doctors, and your child's school. Make sure the psychologist has adequate experience with ADHD and that they are specially trained in ADHD assessment. Bring all medical and educational records to your first session.

2) Schedule an appointment with your primary care doctor to rule-out possible medical explanations for the symptoms (e.g., hypothyroidism, hearing/vision problems).

3) Learn everything you can about ADHD. The following websites generally have reliable information and are a good place to start:

- www.chadd.org
- www.apa.org
- www.add.org
- www.myadhd.com

4) Once a diagnosis is confirmed or ruled-out, your treating psychologist will have specific recommendations for an appropriate course of treatment.

5) Be patient with yourself or your loved-one as ADHD is a chronic condition.

Dr Nicholas Scull is a licensed psychologist and clinical social worker at Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute and practices counseling and psychological testing for ADHD and learning disabilities with children and adults. If you have questions or would like to consult, please call Dr Scull at 2572-0338 or e-mail him at scull@rehabinstitutekuwait.com. All communication with Dr Scull is private and confidential.

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