

Executive effect: Top officials fall ill more in trying times

BY SHEARON ROBERTS

Wellness experts say they are seeing increased signs that the financial crisis has taken its toll on the overall health of executives and business owners.

In Miami, executives in real estate, construction and development and high-end brokers are increasing their visits to their doctors and other wellness centers.

"Developers are number one and then investment bankers," said Dr. Juan Remos, medical director for Wellness and Regenerative Medicine, at the Miami Institute for Age Management and Intervention. Dr. Remos' clients include executives both locally and internationally.

Wealthy people with their fortunes at risk in bank accounts or invested in the stock market are leading in stress-related breakdowns, he said.

"It's like an earthquake," he said. "You have no idea the level of stress when you have millions of dollars at stake."

Anxiety is up as business owners see other businesses crumble around them.

"You have a little bit of a domino effect," said Dr. Gabriela Cora, founder and president of the Executive Health and Wealth Institute in Miami.

Dr. Cora said. "That's why the stress of the financial crisis has really affected and invaded a lot of our spaces."

The stress is also coming from home.

"There is pressure coming from their spouse, their kids," she said. "Many of these kids have grown up affluent and ask their parents for this or that. But now, their parents are saying they can't do it or provide it."

Not being able to support their lavish lifestyle creates tension among the executives and their children or spouse, Dr. Cora has found. The children have been bluntly asking their parents lately if they are going to lose their jobs or their homes, she said. They are telling their parents that they have seen a friend's parent lose a high-paying job or that the family now has to move out of their expensive home.

The impact of the crisis has no discrimination based on gender, either.

"Many women think I have more women clients. I have more men," she said. "Men put more pressure on themselves to be successful and to be the breadwinner."

Most of her female clients have been local business owners who have run their companies for years. Women business



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Gabriela Cora

The first is maximizing exercise to de-stress, particularly for heavy business travelers. The second is focusing on the client's nutrition, helping him to eliminate junk food from his diet. The third is to help the executive get more sleep, to offset anxiety and depression. The fourth is coaching on relaxation techniques.

"We can stay awake one night in the week, but if we do that every day, there is only so much stamina we can produce on a weekly basis," she said.

Some executives take more amphetamines or stimulants so they can work more hours, she said. That only leads to gastrointestinal problems and high blood pressure.

"One of the most common things that happen is that people use coffee as a well-tolerated

norm," Dr. Cora said. "More coffee brings energy, but tense energy, not relaxed energy, so you're wired all the time, which brings on medical issues like high blood pressure, stomach illness and headaches."

Dr. Remos said this is a time for those in management to turn to health alternatives.

"I use some natural supplements. I try to stay away from the drugs," Dr. Remos said.

He has been counseling his patients to use high dosage of Sami, about 800 to 1,600 milligrams per day in the morning on an empty stomach. He also wants his patients to increase their intake of Omega 3 fish oil and 5HTP. He also recommends herbs that are calming and that help patients sleep.

"They are proven scientifically to improve mood and

sleep," Dr. Remos said. "Irritability, depression, short-fuse and insomnia, those are the main things I'm seeing."

For male patients over 45, he has prescribed hormone supplements in some cases, such as testosterone boosters and DHDA boosters.

"During stressful times people produce more cortisone which stores more fat, instead of DHDA," he said.

Without a way to relieve tension, the experts said, clients are drinking more or abusing prescription medication.

"The person is taking an upper to keep them going in the day and then a downer at night," Dr. Cora said. "The up and down only puts the body in a dangerous cycle that leads to medical problems."

Many clients may not feel like exercising, and so Dr. Remos has been recommending yoga, Tai-chi and Qi-chong.

As the temperature drops, people are prone to eating more carbohydrates and with high levels of stress, weight gain would be rapid, he said.

"These are alternative ways to channel energy," Dr. Remos said. "If you can help them be in a healthy state of mind, they can make rational decisions."

Gabriela Cora, founder and president of the Executive Health and Wealth Institute in Miami. The institute offers coaching, consulting and seminars for corporate executives, entrepreneurs, business owners and traveling professionals.

"Even if people are doing well in their business, one of the businesses they're doing business with may be going under," said Dr. Cora, author of the recently released paperback "Leading Under Pressure."

In 2007, 73% of working Americans recognized a link between their stress levels and their health, according to a study by the American Psychological Association. About 52% of Americans don't know how to manage their stress or its impact, the study also found.

Health-related complications from worker stress are the leading reasons employees do not show up for work, researchers found. Worker absenteeism now costs \$200 billion to \$300 billion in annual revenue loss in the US, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Some executives have lost their jobs in the financial crisis, Dr. Cora said. Others have been put in the position of laying off their staff or their friends.

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have been local business owners who have run their companies for years. Women business owners acknowledge stress from tough economic times more readily than men, she found. They tend to seek professional help in the early stages of a stress-related breakdown.

Many male executives, she said, ignore the signs for months.

"They will visit the hospital thinking they're having a heart attack when they're having a panic attack," she said.

That was the case for Gonzalo Munoz, a general manager for the Miami office for a multinational software company. He was traveling often, working in different countries, while his family remained in Miami.

"It was really tough for me," Mr. Munoz said. "I ended up in an emergency room with a hypertension episode."

The doctors told him he had no medical complications and that the breakdown might have occurred from stress. He took up one-on-one sessions with Dr. Cora based on a friend's referral.

"It's a very simple concept, the need to balance," he said. "Our lives are based 90% on our satisfaction of our work and that's where we place our satisfaction, but that shouldn't be so."

Dr. Cora focuses her counseling on four pillars, she said.

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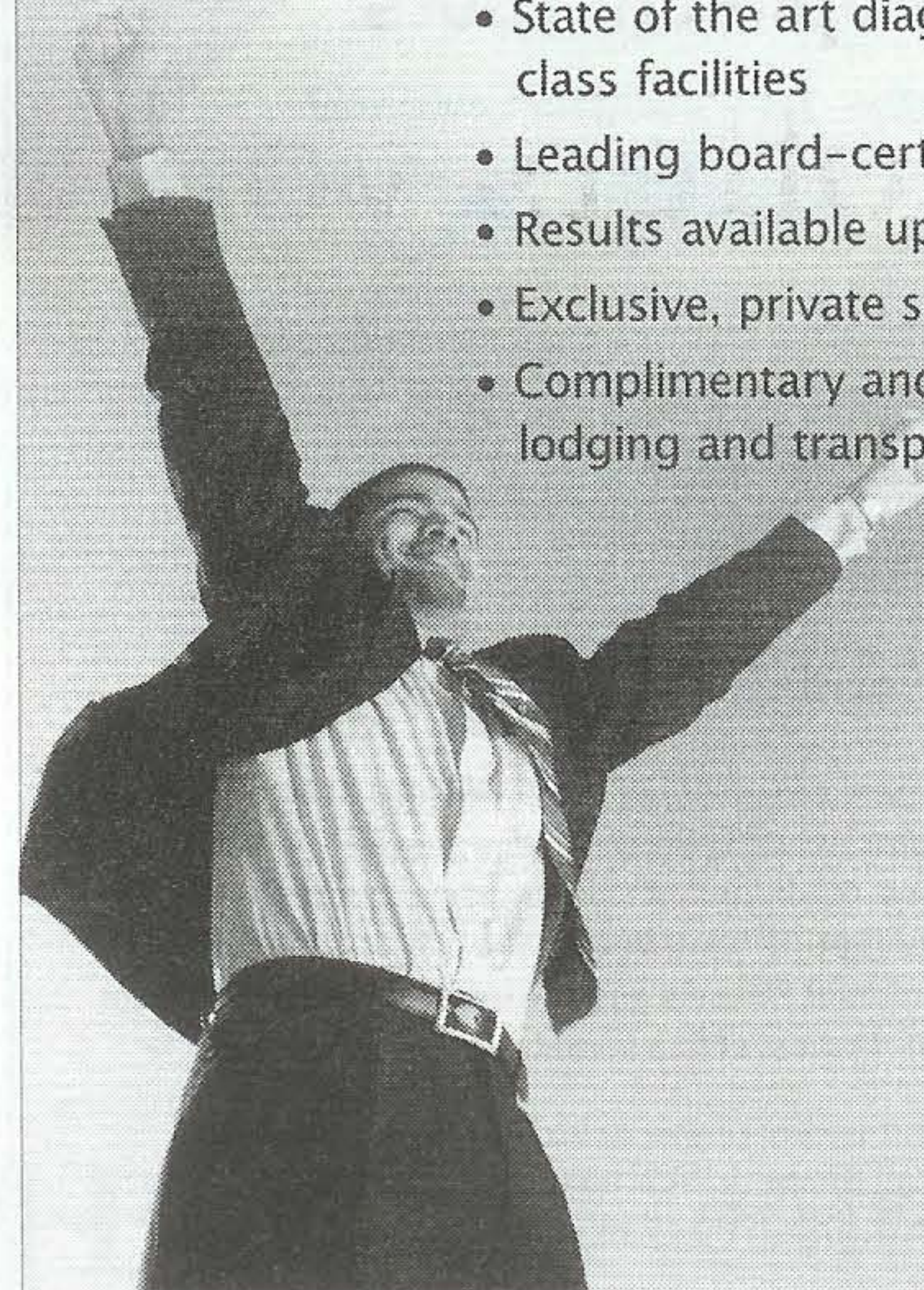
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