

Physicians Health Program Message

## PHP: 30 Years of Throwing Out a Lifeline

By Roland W. Gray, MD, TMF Medical Director



2008 was a banner year for the Tennessee Medical Foundation and the Physicians Health Program.

In 1978, the TMA Board of Trustees established a committee for the purpose of offering professional assistance to physicians suffering from chemical dependences, mental or emotional illness. In 1992, the TMA transferred oversight and management of the program to the Tennessee Medical Foundation (TMF). I'm happy to say the TMF is celebrating 30 years of throwing out a lifeline to troubled doctors. Our mission is to protect patients by identifying, intervening, rehabilitating and advocating for these physicians.

The TMF also welcomed a new president in 2008; Donald Gaines, MD, stepped into the leadership shoes so ably filled by David Gerkin, MD, of Knoxville, who remains a member of our peer review board/committee.

Most important, the TMF continued its amazing success in getting impaired physicians on the road to recovery. More than 97 percent of our physicians return successfully to the practice of medicine; the relapse rate remains at less than 10 percent.

### PHP SERVICES

The breakdown (see Table) shows just under half of the doctors that come into the PHP have chemical addictions – many of them abuse both alcohol and drugs, such as hydrocodone and Ultram. The program offers rehab, counseling and follow-up with these clients. We continue to sign these physicians to a five-year continuing care contract, which includes weekly attendance at our Caduceus support groups held in 12 cities across Tennessee.

Our next biggest group has behavioral issues; for the most part they have been

labeled disruptive in the workplace. We're expecting our referrals to increase starting this year, related to the Joint Commission's alert that disruptive behavior be treated as a sentinel event, requiring reporting and investigation. In this area, we serve as a resource to hospitals, medical groups and doctors so this becomes a rehabilitative rather than a disciplinary process. The PHP offers courses in anger and stress management, conflict resolution and building communication skills, and most are able to return to practice and continue their careers.

We also provide support and referrals to physicians with psychiatric or mental/emotional problems, those with sexual boundary issues, over prescribers and others referred to us by the State Board of Medical Examiners (BME). To head off future potential clients, the TMF is now working with all the medical schools across Tennessee to develop curriculum or courses addressing professionalism, maintaining appropriate boundaries with patients and staff, avoiding disruptive behavior, the rules of prescribing, and educating students and residents about the resources available to them on these topics.

The need for the PHP lifeline has not

diminished in 30 years and, as I mentioned, may actually increase in 2009, and we could use your help. The PHP welcomes your financial assistance, which is tax deductible, as well as your involvement in our efforts. Please contact me or PHP Field Coordinator Jeanne Breard, RN, at 615-467-6411 to find out more information. ■

To make a tax deductible contribution to the Physicians Health Program, contact TMF Administrator Mike Todd at 615-467-6411; write to the Tennessee Medical Foundation, 216 Centerview Dr., Ste. 304, Brentwood, TN 37027; or visit [www.e-tmf.org](http://www.e-tmf.org)



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Table. PHP Clinical Program Statistics: 2002 through 2008 YTD as of November 3, 2008.

YEAR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 YTD	TOTALS
<b>Identifications:</b>								
Chemical	41	60	98	98	69	59	53	478
Behavioral	28	38	49	54	47	37	27	280
Psychiatric	7		20	18	18	21	13	97
Sexual Boundary	7	11	17	15	7	8	7	72
Over-prescribing	4	10	4	5	5	3	4	35
BME Referrals	14		8	6	9	14	3	54
Other/Consultations						5	3	8
<b>TOTALS</b>	101	119	196	196	155	147	110	1024