

Longtime TMF Physicians Health Program Champion Dr. Anderson Retiring

After 33 years as one of the foundational members and leaders of Tennessee Medical Foundation's Physician's Health Program (PHP), a national leader in addressing the problems of distressed physicians, William C. Anderson, MD, will chair his last meeting of the Physician's Health Peer Review Committee (PHPRC) on April 5 and then retire.

"I've been in this program so long it's kind of like a child to me. I hate to leave it but I'll be 78 before too long and now it's time for me to fade into the sunset and let someone else do all this," he said. Dr. Anderson was tapped to shape the program in November 1979, just after completing a chemical dependency program himself. He knew the ins and outs of recovery and, while serving as PHP's volunteer intervention chairman, sought to change the mindset for treating chemically-dependent doctors.

"True alcohol and drug addiction is a disease, not a bad habit," he explained. "I've seen psychiatrists, been to expensive psychiatric treatments; I've known others who have and I can't think of a single one who got clean and sober." Dr. Anderson convinced regional PHP leaders to instead use a medical approach that has since resulted in a 90-plus-percent recovery rate for program participants.

His years of leadership and dedication are deeply appreciated by current medical director, Roland Gray, MD. "In effect, Dr. Anderson ran (and was) the PHP from 1979 to 1985 as a volunteer," said Dr. Gray. "He started doing interventions and provided what we would now refer to as case management, recording by hand his observations on a yellow legal pad that we still have."

After turning over the medical director reins to David Dodd, MD, he continued to serve by doing interventions, chairing the Peer Review Committee and serving on the Tennessee Medical Foundation Board of Directors.

Dr. Anderson's service extended to other organizations as well - he served as medical director for Cumberland Heights Alcohol and Drug Treatment Center in Nashville, and received the Community Service Award from the Middle Tennessee Alcohol and Drug Council.

After three decades, he still firmly believes in the mission and work of the PHP. "It's by far, in my opinion, the best doctors' recovery program in the country," he declared. He is excited about the programs future and worries about its challenges, particularly the issue of increasing numbers of disruptive physicians.

Most of all, Dr. Anderson worries that Tennessee's physician health program's budget will be impacted by lack of funding and/or



Dr. Anderson

attempts by third parties to tell the program how to do its work. "That would be a disaster. It hasn't happened here yet but I know states where it did," he warned.

The PHP also needs the support of doctors, most of whom he said don't even know the program exists until they or a colleague need it. With support from physicians and stable funding, he believes the PHP has a great future providing a

critical service to the medical community.

"When I had a problem back in the 1970s, you either got well on your own or the hospital kicked you off the staff. There were no doctors' treatment programs," Dr. Anderson recalled. "I wish there had been; they could have saved me a lot of misery. I couldn't reach out; no one knew what to do with me. Now, all doctors have to do is make a phone call and we can help them."

The PHP admires him back. "Dr. Bill Anderson's efforts were crucially foundational and continue to this day," said Dr. Gray, adding, "He will be sorely missed!" +

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.

