

THE TENNESSEE MEDICAL FOUNDATION: SAVING LIVES ... SAVING CAREERS

No one is immune from illness or stress, even physicians. We at the Tennessee Medical Foundation (TMF) Physician's Health Program (PHP) should know. We have been in the business of helping doctors since 1978. During this time, we have assisted over 3,000 physicians and their families.

We understand that doctors with physical, emotional or mental health problems, including substance abuse, have always been part of the medical landscape. When it comes to having problems, holding a medical license confers no immunity. Unfortunately, like many of us, physicians often resist seeking help. They are more adept providing help than asking for it. In fact, experts have observed, "the last thing most physicians want to be is a patient". As their problems go untreated, discomfort and suffering mount and patients may be deprived the expert care they deserve.

Physicians often believe that problems like depression, burnout or stress should not affect them. After all, how could so much medical training not enable them to take care of themselves? In truth, many of the problems physicians encounter have always been there, but their practice environment provides the right circumstances for them to surface. For instance, changes in the healthcare environment over the past two decades have weighed heavily on many physicians. Threats of malpractice, inadequate reimbursement, overly long work hours and intense oversight by government agencies contribute to a fertile environment for problems to fester.

As a society we expect much from physicians. They are under constant scrutiny and immense pressure to perform. When making decisions that affect the health and well-being of patients, there is no room for error. In

this environment, stress becomes a constant companion. Like anyone else, physicians can reach a breaking point. The difference is if a physician collapses under the weight of problems, not only is a career in jeopardy, patient safety is also compromised. Hence, part of the mission of the Physician's Health Program is to protect patients. Their safety is paramount. To do this, the program has developed a sophisticated and confidential process to ensure that patient safety is preserved and a highly trained, valuable physician is rehabilitated. It has worked well for over thirty years, to the benefit of physicians, patients and the citizens of Tennessee. To head off future potential clients, the PHP also works closely with all of Tennessee's medical schools to develop courses to address the rules of prescribing, avoiding disruptive behavior, maintaining proper boundaries and educating students and residents about the resources available to them.

In the early days almost all the physicians the PHP assisted had an alcohol or drug use disorder. Today, our scope has broadened to include not only alcohol and drug disorders but also stress, burnout, misprescribing, boundary issues, and an array of physical and mental health problems while simultaneously addressing problems not encountered in the past, such as meeting the needs of the increasing number of women and minorities entering the profession.

Referrals to the Physician's Health Program originate from hospitals, medical groups, concerned colleagues, family members and the Tennessee Health Related Boards. Many physicians now come through self-referral which we especially welcome. Regardless of source, all referral contacts are confidential. Experience has shown that getting help from the TMF is not complicated or difficult. In fact, help is a phone call away.

The TMF Physician's Health program stands ready to assist. The following are some of the problems physicians encounter for which support and resources are available:

- Substance abuse
- Family and relationship problems
- Behavioral issues
- Grief and loss
- Psychiatric and emotional problems
- Work, career & retirement concerns
- Professional boundary issues
- Cognitive concerns
- Stress and burnout
- Chronic Pain
- Prescribing issues
- Eating disorders
- Work life balance
- Physical problems
- Malpractice stress and legal problems



Today under the leadership of Roland W. Gray, M.D. the PHP continues to provide expert care to physicians and their families. Dr. Gray was hired as Medical Director in 2001 after a lengthy career in pediatrics and addiction medicine. His involvement with the program began more than twenty years earlier as a volunteer assisting physicians in need. Under his leadership, the TMF has grown into one of the most admired and respected Physician's Health Programs in the U.S.

If you know a physician who may need help, please contact the TMF Physician's Health Program at (615) 467-6411 or visit our website at www.e-tmf.org where information about our services, policies, staff and various in-house publications may be found.



The mission of the Physician's Health Program (PHP) is to protect patients through identification, intervention, rehabilitation, and the provision of advocacy for physicians impaired by addictive disease, mental or emotional illness.

The Tennessee Medical Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization. Tax deductible contributions may be made to the Tennessee Medical Foundation, 216 Centerview Drive, Suite 304, Brentwood, Tennessee 37027 or made online at www.e-tmf.org. Thank you for your support, donations and commitment to physician health.