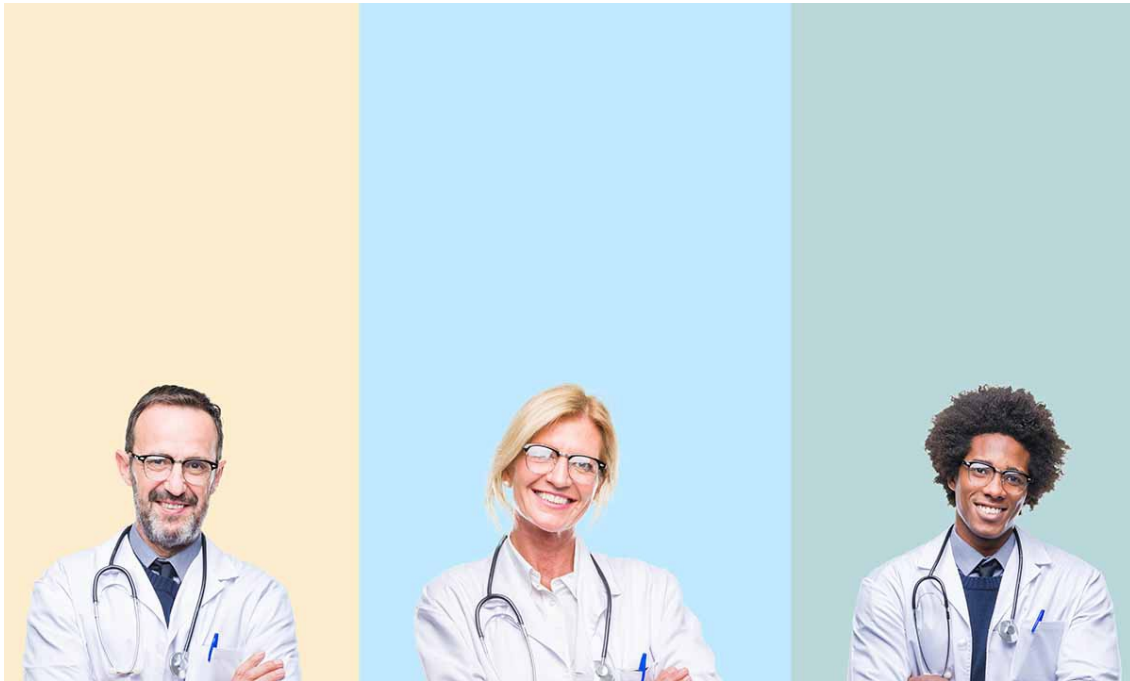


Physician Mental Health Help Now More Proactive with TN PSQ



By Michael Baron, MD, MPH, FASAM

Physician mental health is a big issue these days, with burnout rates approaching 54 percent. There is a huge amount of stigma that limits a physician's ability to get help, including the fear of licensure, career or practice issues, as well as the fear of being considered "less than" by their peers, colleagues, administrators, and employers.

In addition to overall mental health problems, suicide rates are increasing in both the general and physician populations. Physicians are twice as likely to die by suicide than non-physicians. We have been made aware of recent completed suicides at two medical schools in Tennessee, which sadly means there are probably more we don't know about.

Traditionally, Physician Health Programs have been reactive in their assistance, waiting for a crisis to occur and then making initial contact via a phone call. Amid a growing number of mental health referrals, the TMF realized it needs to have a more proactive approach.

After a long search for the right resource, the TMF partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) in 2019 to develop the Tennessee Professional Screening Questionnaire, or TN PSQ. As of February 3, this online mental health screening tool is available statewide. Thanks to SVMIC and other key stakeholders, including the Tennessee Board of Medical Examiners, Tennessee Medical Association, and the Tennessee Hospital Association, we are now able to offer this to all physicians licensed in Tennessee, as well as all trainees and medical students located in Tennessee.

The TN PSQ utilizes the AFSP's Interactive Screening Program (ISP). This platform is being used by healthcare organizations across the country. For example, the University of California-San Diego incorporates the questionnaire into its HEAR (Healer Education Assessment and Referral) staff wellness program, with good results. We are hoping to see similar success here in Tennessee.

The goal is to connect Tennessee physicians, trainees, and medical students in distress with mental health services in an anonymous, confidential, free, and voluntary way – ideally before a call to the TMF is necessary. Data is encrypted to protect anonymity, and online engagement with a psychiatric professional is offered but optional. All utilization is driven by the user.

The hope is that this resource will be used widely across Tennessee. This tool is available to all the professions we are contracted to serve, including physicians (MDs and DOs), physician assistants, chiropractors, podiatrists, veterinarians, x-ray technologists, clinical perfusionists, and their respective trainees and students. There are over 16,000 physicians with a Tennessee license alone so if we reach even 10 percent, that is still a huge number. If it helps to save even one person's life or career, it's worthwhile.

Mental illness knows no boundaries of race, religion, or profession. Physicians are just as susceptible, if not more so, than the general population. They're also innately paranoid about services provided by organized medicine or their employer, so this will hopefully be an outlet for them to receive free, confidential, anonymous, and a completely voluntary assessment of their mental health. They can take the self-screening and then go from there. It is their choice.

We are also sharing this new resource with additional organizations, including medical schools, medical societies, and specialty organizations. Each of these partners is spreading the word about this resource in its own way, which means physicians and other health professionals will learn about the TN PSQ from multiple sources, which is by design. In this case, duplication of effort is desired. We want everyone who is struggling to have a chance to get connected to available resources, one way or another. We don't care

how they get help, only that they do.

The Tennessee Medical Foundation has provided an excellent set of Frequently Asked Questions regarding the TN PSQ which are available [here](#).

[Access the TN PSQ.](#)

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