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## 2024 CADUCEUS RETREAT WRAP-UP: "YOUR FUTURE SELF"

**TMF Physician's Health Program participants, graduates, staff, and special guests came together** in June for a weekend of recovery-focused education and connection during the 37<sup>th</sup> Caduceus Retreat, held in Franklin, TN.

Stephanne Thornton, MSW, LICSW, MAC, of the West Virginia Judicial & Lawyer Assistance Program, was the general session speaker, presenting a day-long session titled, "Your Future Self, Pitfalls to Avoid, and the Precious Present." Session 1 focused on "The Science Behind My Future Self," exploring the past and present self as well as theoretical perspectives on the future self. Session 2, titled "Taking a Rigorous Look at Ourselves," led participants through the process of learning to write



*Retreat speaker Stephanie Thornton led attendees in considering the concept of "Your Future Self" and its impact on recovery.*

and tell their own stories. Session 3 was on "Recognizing Pitfalls That Take Recovery Off-Track," including both internal and external forces that bear down and can derail recovery. Session 4 spoke to "Commitment Tools, One Day at a Time, and Valuing the Present."

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## TMF WELCOMES NEW PHQIC CONSUMER MEMBER: REV. TERRY HUNLEY



**The TMF is pleased to welcome** its newest consumer member of the Physician Health Quality Improvement Committee, Terry Hunley, MDiv, of Jackson, TN. He will serve a three-year term on the PHQIC,

which oversees the clinical work of the TMF Physician's Health Program.

Rev. Hunley grew up as a pastor's kid in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. He graduated from Bethel College in 1983 with a double major in Accounting and Business Administration and earned his Master of Divinity from Memphis Theological Seminary in 1986. He served as a Chaplain in the U.S. Army

for eight years while in both active duty and reserve. Upon discharge he worked as an investment representative for Edward Jones in Germantown, TN. He has pastored churches in Sharon, TN; Cordova, TN; Memphis, TN; Paducah, KY; and has been the pastor of First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Jackson, TN, since 2004.

Rev. Hunley serves on the Board of Trustees of Bethel University and is an avid Mississippi State Fan. He enjoys traveling (especially cruises) and is a crypto nerd. Wife Lorrie Hunley has been a pharmaceutical sales rep for 26 years, currently with Bayer Pharmaceuticals. They have two children, Daniel Hunley (36) of Nashville, and Dr. Ashton Hunley Pool (34) of Murray, KY.

Thank you to Rev. Hunley for helping to oversee our mission to Save Lives, Save Careers! 🙏



## MEDICAL DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

# RISK FACTORS AND FEARS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO PHYSICIAN SUICIDE: AN UPDATE

BY MICHAEL BARON, MD, MPH, DFASAM  
TMF Medical Director

*Editor's Note: This article is an update of one originally published in the TMA Journal "Tennessee Medicine" in 2018 and republished this summer in TMA's "Topline" newsletter.*

**Having just observed National Physician Suicide Awareness Day and Suicide Awareness Month in September**, the topic of risk factors for physician suicide is timely and important. Physicians die by suicide all too often, completing suicide more frequently than non-physicians of similar gender, education level, and age.<sup>1</sup> Physicians who complete suicide were also less likely to be receiving mental health treatment than non-physicians who completed suicide.<sup>2</sup>

While some facts are established, the actual suicide rate for physicians is up for discussion. An oft-repeated statistic – that between 300-400 physicians die by suicide every year – has been recently deemed unproven. It's tough to come up with an accurate number and existing studies are too small, too old, or too narrow to be reliable. What is proven is that physicians are at a slightly higher risk than the general population, and female physicians even more so.<sup>1</sup> A 2023 Medscape survey found nine percent of physicians struggled with suicidal ideation. Patients are impacted, too, because doctors experiencing suicidal thoughts are ill and not delivering quality healthcare.

Physicians work hard to earn the privilege of relieving suffering, yet they are slow to ask for care and support when they are the ones who suffer. Reports show they are afraid of the consequences for seeking help, especially for mental health needs. They worry it will hurt their career, or lead to a State Medical Board (SMB) action. Even worse, the catastrophic thinking common with depression often results in irrational fears such as loss of license, bankruptcy, and ultimate failure. Their fears are unfounded; treatment for illness that has not impacted patient care, including mental illness, will not lead to SMB actions.

### ILLNESS VS. IMPAIRMENT

Physicians are human and are allowed to be ill. Illness only becomes an issue when it advances into functional impairment. The distinction is critical: illness is the existence of a disease, while impairment is diminished ability to perform specific activities.<sup>3</sup> A physician with the flu presents with a high fever, malaise, myalgia, and anorexia – symptoms that can impair cognitive function. The SMB would not take an interest if a febrile physician was at home in bed, where they belong; the SMB would be upset if that physician went to work, still infectious and impaired by the fever.

The same is true for mood disorders. If a depressed physician seeks help early in the illness, the SMB would not be concerned or involved. The SMB *would* be concerned if a severely depressed physician told to take medical leave did not heed instructions and went to work, impaired by the

illness. Getting help for a condition that has not impacted patient care will not result in SMB action.

Some fear about help-seeking is rationally generated by "have you ever been treated or monitored"-type questions on medical license applications. These questions stigmatize mental illness and raise paranoia levels among doctors. The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) has worked with SMBs to change those application questions, lately bolstered by the national "ALL IN Wellbeing First for Healthcare" campaign. This past April, Tennessee became the 27<sup>th</sup> state to earn the "Wellbeing First Champion" badge by changing its medical licensure application questions. This is especially important in light of the current increasing prevalence of Physician Burnout Syndrome, one of the precursors to suicide. While an AMA survey found the physician burnout rate fell in 2023, this is especially important since nearly half of licensed physicians still exhibit at least one burnout symptom.<sup>4</sup>

***"Physicians who complete suicide were also less likely to be receiving mental health treatment than non-physicians who completed suicide."***

### RISK FACTORS

Risk factors for physician suicide include: over 50 years of age, marital discord or divorce, substance use disorders, process addictions such as gambling and workaholism, symptoms of depression and anxiety, chronic pain, loss of autonomy and control, burnout syndrome, financial stress, and access to lethal means. Physicians found unfit to practice medicine are also an independent high-risk group; that finding may trigger a cascade of adverse social and financial consequences.<sup>3</sup> Chronic benzodiazepine use is another independent risk factor for suicide, as it is disinhibiting and may impair resilience due to associated brain dysfunction.<sup>5</sup>

### REACH OUT

If you are struggling with mental health or suicide, please get help. If you know someone with depression, substance use, or who has been found unfit to practice medicine, please reach out to them. It is acceptable and even preferable to ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide. Whatever the reply, an appropriate response is, "It's okay to ask for help. We'll get through this together." And then assist them to access help.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# FALL BRINGS REFLECTION ON BLESSINGS AND TMF MISSION MOMENTS

BY CLAY RUNNELS, MD, MBA  
TMF President

**Last week the air temperature fell, reminding me of the coming fall season.** Fall is my favorite time of the year in Northeast Tennessee. Cool temperatures, football season, holiday preparation, and many other cultural norms make this time of year incredibly special. As I approach the end of my first year as president of the TMF Board of Directors, I am thinking how blessed I am to work with committed staff members who have accomplished so much over the last few years. The TMF team is well recognized not only for its success in protecting patient safety in support and advocacy of professionals, but for the relentless pursuit of new and innovative ways to accomplish that mission. There are so many incredible "mission moments" to highlight.

This year, Dr. Baron and the staff worked extremely hard on continued improvement in the support of professionals in recovery. I would like to say how proud we are of Dr. Baron, who is in his first year as president of the Federation of State Physician Health Programs. This honor is well deserved for a leader who is committed to his profession and to people in need of treatment and advocacy. It also provides an important link to collaboration with other PHPs and like-minded organizations across the nation. Please join us in congratulating him on his appointment and service.



Another highlight: the TMF and Dr. Baron will be creating CME videos on topics related to opioid addiction and treatment. This series will help further the knowledge base for providers on the key elements of Opioid Use Disorder and treatment. The videos are made possible by grant funds related to the opioid abatement process. We are immensely proud that we can use these funds in a proactive way to prevent and treat those affected by the opioid epidemic.

Finally, the TMF began serving a new profession on July 1, adding respiratory therapists to our group of clients. The full list of professions we serve is on our website at [e-tmf.org/faqs](http://e-tmf.org/faqs).

As the TMF endeavors to accomplish our mission, we would like to thank our partners, donors, and volunteers. Without this support the TMF cannot maintain its role as the first place where health professionals in crisis turn for help.

I wish all of you a blessed and happy fall season. 🍂

## EVENTS CALENDAR

### TMF Board Retreat

October 11-13, 2024

Fall Creek Falls — *Spencer, TN*

### TMF PHQIC Meeting

December 6, 2024

Tennessee Medical Association — *Nashville, TN*

### FSPHP Annual Education Conference

April 23-26, 2025

Hyatt Regency Seattle — *Seattle, WA*

### TMF Caduceus Retreat

June 6-8, 2025

Franklin Marriott Cool Springs — *Franklin, TN*

### IDAA Annual Meeting

July 9-13, 2025

The Davenport Grand — *Spokane, WA*



## IDA 2024



TMF Medical Director Dr. Michael Baron (right), pictured with Drs. Chris Bundy and Laura Moss, both of the Washington Physician's Health Program (WPHP), at the International Doctors in Alcoholics Anonymous conference in Baltimore, MD, in July. Dr. Baron was a featured presenter, speaking on "The Future of Physician Health Programs."

## QUALITY CONTROL



Members of the TMF Physician's Health Quality Improvement Committee relax before getting down to business at their August meeting. The PHQIC oversees the clinical side of the Physician's Health Program.

## BURNOUT EDUCATION



Dr. Baron spoke to residents at Ascension Saint Thomas Midtown in Nashville in August, presenting on "Burnout, Boundaries, Illness & Impairment."

## PRESIDENTS' REUNION



TMF Development Coordinator Brenda Williams-Denbo caught up with former TMF Board Presidents Dr. Mack Worthington and Dr. Tim Davis during her July visit to Chattanooga. Dr. Worthington served as president from 2009-2011, and Dr. Davis from 2020-2022.

# TMF, TPRN HOST 2ND ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH, RECOVERY, & SUICIDE PREVENTION SUMMIT

For a second year, the Tennessee Medical Foundation and the Tennessee Pharmacy Recovery Network co-hosted the Interprofessional Mental Health, Recovery, and Suicide Prevention Summit, held September 20 at the Tennessee Pharmacists Association’s Research and Education Foundation Center in Nashville.

“This is a crucial event dedicated to fostering awareness, education, and actionable strategies for mental health and recovery,” said TPRN Director Nancy Hooper, DPh.

Attendees earned up to 3.0 hours of CME/CE for the full afternoon session. Invited professionals included physicians, pharmacists, PAs, nurses and NPs, veterinarians, and vet techs, victim advocates, dentists, victim advocates, and social workers, including students and trainees of all the professions.

Speakers included A.J. Reid Finlayson, MD, MMHC, DLFAPA, FASAM, medical director of the Vanderbilt Comprehensive Assessment Program, leading a session on the role of recovery monitoring in long-term sobriety; Elizabeth Power, MEd, CEO of EPower & Associates and principal of The Trauma Informed Academy, speaking on trauma-responsive skills critical for healthcare workers; and Brenda Williams-Denbo, BA, development coordinator of the TMF, presenting the American Foundation for

Suicide Prevention’s “Talk Saves Lives” suicide prevention program for health professionals.

The Summit was created in 2023 by TMF and TPRN in response to increasing mental health referrals, and to observe National Recovery Month and National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Both organizations hope to host the event annually each September. 🇺🇸

## TMF OPIOID ABATEMENT UPDATE: WORK IS UNDERWAY

As announced in our Spring newsletter, the TMF was one of more than 80 organizations across the state awarded a grant by the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council. The grant period is 2024-2026; funds became available on July 1, and we are happy to report that we are already at work on the projects submitted under the grant to help address the opioid crisis.

The TMF has joined the Rural Health Association of Tennessee’s Rural Community Opioid Response Program (RCORP), dedicated to addressing the opioid crisis in Tennessee’s rural communities by providing resources, education, and support to local healthcare providers, first responders, and community organizations. With a goal of reducing substance use disorder in Tennessee, the program focuses on building a consortium to increase access to treatment, prevention, and recovery services. We are collaborating with RCORP to develop sustainable solutions for opioid challenges in rural areas. To learn more, visit [tnruralhealth.org/rcorp](http://tnruralhealth.org/rcorp).

Among the funded projects over the next three years is the creation of several CME videos addressing opioid addiction and treatment. The TMF is working with a Nashville-based video production company; the first video will be a two-hour Proper Prescribing course with special focus on opioids and opioid alternatives. Filming will begin late this fall with the goal of completing this video by spring or early summer 2025. We hope to have details about when and where to access the video in the Fall 2025 edition of *Physician’s Health*.

Opioid grant funds will also underwrite a TMF outcome study, led by Kathryn Sielbeck-Mathes, PhD, executive director of Measurement That Matters in Nashville. The study will help determine the impact and effectiveness of our Physician’s Health Program (PHP) recovery work, including among participants with opioid use disorder.

Finally, the grant will also fund the TMF PHP’s ongoing assistance, monitoring, and support for Tennessee physicians and other health professionals with opioid use disorder. 🇺🇸



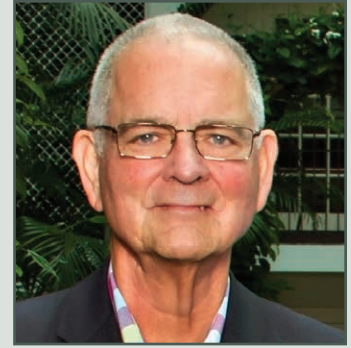
# TMF MEMORIAL: FORMER STAFF MEMBER VINCE PARRISH, LCSW

**The Tennessee Medical Foundation is grieved by the loss of former TMF Case Manager and Development Coordinator Vince Parrish earlier this year.**

Vincent Leigh Parrish, 77, died on April 28 surrounded by loved ones. He is survived by his wife Jane Parrish, daughter Lindsey Byers, son-in-law Scott Byers, and grandson Drew Byers. He also leaves behind many loving family members, friends, and colleagues.



*TMF staff photo 2013: (L-R) Executive Assistant Amanda Rambo, Vince Parrish, Administrator Michael Todd, Case Manager Jeanne Breard, RN, Administrative Assistant Julie Eberle, and Medical Director Dr. Roland Gray (seated, deceased 2018).*



**Vince Parrish**  
*August 1, 1946 - April 28, 2024*

“Vince was one of the gentlest souls that I ever knew,” recalled former TMF Administrator Mike Todd, who said they both started at the TMF on the same day in 2003. “I was privileged to work with him for almost 18 years. He will always remain in my heart, he really will.”

He was a social worker, therapist, and educator who valued kindness and curiosity. Mr. Parrish joined the TMF in 2003, serving as a case manager and later transitioning to oversee development and fundraising for the Foundation. He retired from the TMF in 2016 and worked for several more years as a staff therapist for the Sexual Assault Center (SAC) of Nashville.

Vince Parrish was a graduate of Bellarmine University and held graduate degrees from Peabody College and the University of Tennessee. He was a member of AA for 36 years and Arlington Street Church in Boston. 🙏

**In memory of Vince, please plant a tree, or send a donation to Pepper’s Fund, created in 2020 for SAC clients with urgent financial needs:**

Pepper’s Fund, care of Sexual Assault Center of Nashville  
101 French Landing  
Nashville, TN 37228

<https://sacenter.org/get-involved/peppers-fund.aspx>



*Dr. Nancy Hooper shared about her personal recovery journey in the Sunday session.*

## 2024 CADUCEUS RETREAT *(Continued from Page 1)*

On Sunday, participants welcomed former TMF Case Manager Nancy Hooper, DPh, back to the retreat. Dr. Hooper, now director of the Tennessee Pharmacy Recovery Network, shared her personal recovery story in the closing session.

## ABOUT THE RETREAT

The Caduceus Retreat, held annually in June, is required for current TMF Physician’s Health Program participants; graduates are welcome and encouraged to attend to continue learning and growing in recovery, and to connect with and support colleagues who are just beginning their recovery journey.

## SAVE THE DATE

The TMF’s 38th Caduceus Retreat is scheduled for June 6-8, 2025, at the Franklin Marriott Cool Springs. 🙏



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

# GIVING THANKS

BY JENNIFER RAINWATER  
TMF Executive Director

**It is fitting that we have a designated time each year to express gratitude for our many blessings.** In my nine years at the TMF I have learned that gratitude is an essential practice in recovery. I have heard the testimonies of past participants who have said that practicing gratitude was the real turning point in solid recovery. It's remarkable that something so simple could be so powerful.

There are many people I am thankful for today.

First, I would like to thank our faithful Caduceus group leaders across the state. Your commitment to helping others in recovery is an inspiration to me. Thank you for showing up every week and caring for those in your group. You are an essential part of what we do at the TMF.

Thanks to those of you in our Physician's Health Program who have put your trust in us and others to help you find recovery; I am proud of the work you are doing to make the changes needed to get better both personally and professionally.

I am also grateful for our supportive Board of Directors, our Physician's Health Quality Improvement Committee, and the TMF Loan Fund Board. Your understanding of what we do and your innovation in helping us improve as an organization is invaluable. You are some of the kindest people I know.

Thank you to our wonderful staff. Mike, Brenda, Tamiko, April, Dot, and Barbara – you all go above and beyond for our participants. I look forward to coming to work every day and seeing your smiling faces. The work you are doing is saving lives. I am so grateful for you all.

To the many hospitals, foundations, and organizations that support us, we are blessed by your continued giving. And special thanks to SVMIC and the Tennessee Medical Association for your partnership with us and your assistance to our participants.



Ms. Rainwater (2nd from R) and staff during the 2024 Caduceus Retreat in June: Tamiko Webb, Dr. Baron, Brenda Williams-Denbo, April Mallory, Barbara Nicks, and Dot Walker.

And finally, I am filled with gratitude for our many individual donors. Your devotion to giving to this program shows us that what we are doing is meaningful and important to you, your families, and your patients. You inspire us to strive to do better every day. 🍂

With thanks,



Share your thoughts with Ms. Rainwater at [jenniferr@e-tmf.org](mailto:jenniferr@e-tmf.org).

### MEDICAL DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE (Continued from Page 2)

Crisis resources include 988 or Tennessee Mobile Crisis, a 24/7 response team, at (855) 274-7471. For less emergent needs, the TMF Physician's Health Program (TMF-PHP) provides assessment and referral help. The TMF-PHP is a confidential service for physicians that can also provide recovery monitoring and advocacy when appropriate. There is also the Tennessee Professional Screening Questionnaire (TN-PSQ), a free, anonymous online mental health screening tool, available at [tn.providerwellness.org](http://tn.providerwellness.org). Learn more at [e-tmf.org](http://e-tmf.org) or call 615-467-6411. 🍂

### References:

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2. Gold K, Sen A, Schwenk T. Details on suicide among US physicians: data from the National Violent Death Reporting System. *Gen Hosp Psychiatry*. 2013;35(1):45-49.
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5. Iannelli RJ, et al. Suicidal behavior among physicians referred for fitness-for-duty evaluation. *Gen Hosp Psychiatry*. 2014 Nov-Dec;36(6):732-6.

Share your thoughts with Dr. Baron at [michaelb@e-tmf.org](mailto:michaelb@e-tmf.org).



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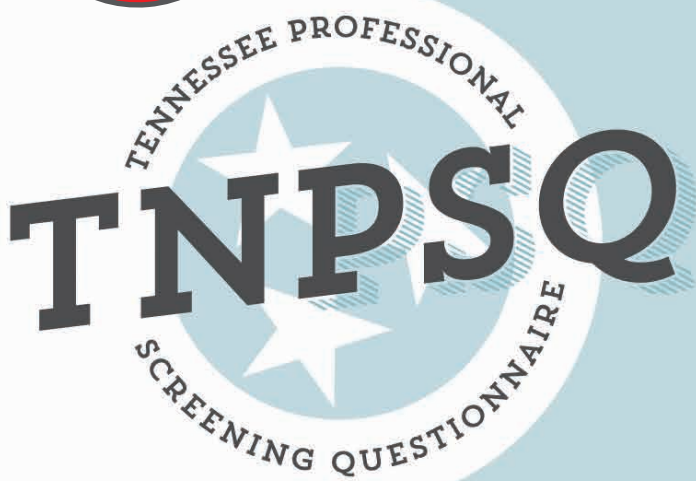
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**LIFE CAN BE STRESSFUL AT TIMES.**

Whatever you’re struggling with—family pressures, work, relationship issues, grief, stress or financial concerns—it is easy to get overwhelmed without an idea of where to turn for support.

The TN-PSQ is a **SAFE AND SECURE ONLINE TOOL** now available to health professionals in Tennessee, both licensed and in training: physicians, PAs, chiropractors, veterinarians, podiatrists, optometrists, x-ray technologists, clinical perfusionists. **It’s as simple as:**



CLICK • CONNECT • CHAT

*Visit the link below to take an anonymous mental health screening and find resources nearby.*

**TN.PROVIDERWELLNESS.ORG**