

## **Committee for Physicians Health**

---

Susan Eisner, MPH, CASAC, Education Outreach

Coordinator, Committee for Physicians Health

Contact Information:

**Telephone: 1-800-338-1833** (in New York State only), or The Committee for Physician Health **(518) 436-4723** (all other locations).

99 Washington Avenue, Suite 1111  
Albany, NY 12210

Fax : (518)436-7943

Email: [info@mssnycph.org](mailto:info@mssnycph.org)

Website: [www.mssny.org](http://www.mssny.org)

### **A Caring Approach Based on the Medical Profession's Tradition of Health**

The mission of the Committee for Physician Health is to promote quality medical care by providing confidential assistance to physicians, resident physicians, medical students and physician assistants suffering from Substance Use disorders or other psychiatric disorders. The Committee monitors the treatment and clinical practice of program participants and provides advocacy and support as well as outreach activities, including prevention and education.

#### **? Services Offered by the Committee for Physician Health:**

- Outreach and CME Education
- Intervention and Confidential Assessment
- Referral to Specialized Treatment
- Monitoring to Ensure Recovery Process
- Consultation: Legal and Dept. of Health/ Office of Professional Medical Conduct
- Legal Referral
- Policy Development and Forms Review
- Advocacy: Employment, Licensure, Etc.
- Assistance on New 2001 JCAHO Standard

#### **? The Committee for Physician Health**

The Committee for Physicians' Health (CPH) exemplifies the medical profession's long-standing tradition of concern for colleagues who are suffering from disorders that could impair a physician's health and ability to practice medicine. The CPH program recognizes that mental illness, substance abuse, and chemical dependency are diseases that can be successfully treated.

Compassionate intervention can help save an individual's career and possibly his or her life. The program is nonjudgmental, confidential, and supportive of individuals who may or may not be able to help themselves.

### ? **Recognizing Patterns of Impairment**

The Committee for Physicians' Health was founded to help physicians affected by substance abuse, addiction, mental health problems, and cognitive disorders. Early in the course of these diseases, physicians exhibit problems with family and friends or face other interpersonal difficulties. As the disease progresses, the physician's ability to practice medicine is impaired.

### ? **The Referral Process**

Anyone can make a referral to CPH. Most referrals (75%) come from colleagues or physicians seeking help for themselves. Nurses, other healthcare professionals, workers, friends, and family members concerned enough to help also initiate referrals.

If you call CPH about a colleague, your phone call will be held in the strictest confidence. The identity of a referral source is never revealed unless the caller agrees. Once a referral is made, program staff members gather information to better define the extent of the disease. The CPH Medical Director and/or local physicians may meet with the referred physician to candidly discuss reports of unusual behavior and determine if a problem exists. Denial is a significant part of the disease and often the initial response. However, when approached by concerned and caring colleagues, most physicians will candidly admit a need for help and will agree to participate in the program.

### ? **Individual Treatment Plans That Work**

Individual program plans are developed under the supervision of the CPH Medical Director, and are planned with the case managers, the referred physician, and those involved in treatment. The CPH program relies on a variety of inpatient and outpatient services for detoxification, rehabilitation, and psychiatric care, in addition to attendance at self-help or peer support groups. The Committee for Physicians' Health can also provide emotional support and other assistance for the colleagues and families of physicians in the program.

### ? **Continued Help during Recovery**

Having encouraged physicians to seek help, CPH monitors the physician's recovery from chemical dependency for a minimum of **five** years. The monitoring process helps to document wellness and to ensure that the physician is making progress in recovery. It also provides a basis for future advocacy. When appropriate, CPH advocates for physicians who are currently active and cooperative in the program, or who have successfully completed the monitoring phase. When appropriate, CPH **advocates** for physicians whose license or medical credentials are being scrutinized by potential employers, the Department of Health, hospitals, third party payers, specialty boards or other agencies.

### ? **The Assurance of Confidentiality**

The confidentiality of the CPH program participants, referral sources and CPH records are protected by New York State and Federal laws. Anyone who makes a referral or volunteers to work with CPH participants shall not be liable for actions taken in good faith and without malice. CPH does not refer physicians to the New York State Department of Health's Office of Professional Medical Conduct as long as the physician agrees to participate, stays with the program, is helped by treatment, and does not present an imminent danger to the public.

### ? **Possible Indications of Impairment:**

- Unkempt appearance, poor hygiene
- Trembling, slurred speech
- Bloodshot or bleary eyes
- Complaints by patients and nurses
- Arguments, bizarre behavior
- Irritability, depression, mood swings
- Irresponsibility, poor memory, poor concentration
- Unexplained accidents or injuries to self
- Neglect of family, isolation from friends
- DWI arrest or DUI violations
- Financial and/or legal problems
- Difficult to contact; won't answer phone or return calls
- Dwindling medical practice
- Missed appointments, unexplained absences
- Rounds at irregular times
- Loss of interest in professional activities, social or community affairs
- Neglect of patients, incomplete charting, or neglect of other medical staff duties
- Inappropriate treatment or dangerous orders
- Excessive prescription writing
- Unusually high doses or wastage noted in drug logs
- Noticeable dependency on alcohol or drugs to relieve stress
- Intoxicated at social events or odor of alcohol on breath while on duty

### ? **Whom does it help?**

Physicians with alcohol or drug abuse/ dependencies, mental illness, or other potentially impairing disorders. It is open to all New York State physicians, physicians retired from practice, residents, medical students, and physician assistants.

### ? **What does it offer?**

Education, assessment, intervention, and referral to individualized treatment programs, monitoring for at least two years, advocacy if needed, and general support in facing the consequences of disease. CPH can offer reassurance to hospital administrators, business partners, and others, that the physician is being properly monitored and that reemergence of the disease will be dealt with appropriately.

**? Assistance for Physicians with Disruptive Behaviors**

Disruptive behavior is defined as a consistent pattern of unprofessional, uncooperative and contentious behavior which creates a hostile working environment and interferes with the ability of others to deliver quality patient care. Physicians with disruptive behavior may seek the assistance of CPH when faced with difficulties in the hospital or with an employer. Those with behavioral health disorders are eligible to receive CPH services.

**? Assistance with New JCAHO Standard on Physician Health**

JCAHO has adopted a new Hospital Medical Staff Standard (MS 2.6) on Physician Health. The new standard requires that the medical staff (1) manage physician health matters separately from disciplinary matters, (2) establish a process for handling potential physician impairment, and (3) train physicians and other hospital staff members to recognize physician impairment. Nationwide, JCAHO endorses the utilization of a statewide system, which in New York State is MSSNY's Committee for Physicians' Health (CPH). CPH is available to assist your medical staff with JCAHO compliance.

**? How can I make a referral or get information?**

***All calls are confidential!***

Please call **1-800-338-1833** (in New York State only), or The Committee for Physician Health **(518) 436-4723** (all other locations).

99 Washington Avenue, Suite 1111  
Albany, NY 12210

Fax: (518) 436-7943

Email: [info@mssnycph.org](mailto:info@mssnycph.org)

Website: [www.mssny.org](http://www.mssny.org)