

Developments with the West Virginia Physician Health Program

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West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program

In early 2005, under the auspices of the West Virginia State Medical Association, the Physician's Health Program Task Force was established in order to develop such a program in West Virginia. The Task Force was composed of representatives from organizations including the WV State Medical Association, the WV Board of Medicine, the WV Board of Osteopathy, the WV Hospital Association, the WV Mutual Insurance Company, WV-PAGE, the WV Society of Osteopathic Medicine, and interested others. Their vision and hard work led to the passage of Senate Bill 573 on March 8, 2007, which was signed into law March 18, 2007. This bill authorizes the West Virginia Board of Medicine and the West Virginia Board of Osteopathy to designate "programs in which physicians, podiatrists and physician assistants may be monitored while they pursue treatment and recovery for alcohol abuse, chemical dependency or major mental illness; enrolling on a voluntary basis without being subject to disciplinary action if the person complies with the goals and restrictions of the program."

In response to this opportunity, the West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program (WVMPHP) was developed and subsequently registered as a corporation August 17, 2007. The founding organizations, WVMPHP Board of Directors and staff continue their work in the development, establishment, organization, funding and structure of this worthwhile endeavor. The following mission was established: "To protect healthcare consumers through seeking the early identification and rehabilitation of physicians, surgeons, and other healthcare professionals with potentially impairing health concerns including abuse of mood-altering drugs including alcohol, mental illness or physical illness affecting competency so that physicians, surgeons, and other healthcare professionals so afflicted may be treated, monitored and returned to the safe practice of their profession to the benefit of the healthcare profession and the patients we serve."

Next, after nearly two-and-a-half years in development, the Board of Medicine signed an agreement



Back row from left to right: Robert Knittle, MS; Renee Green, RN; Marlene Barker; P. Brad Hall, MD; Elizabeth Spangler, MD; Pam Moyers Scott, PA-C, R. Curtis Arnold, DPM; and Amy Tolliver. Seated from left to right: John Wade, MD, and Joseph Selby, MD.

with the WVMPHP to provide monitoring services to licensees with addiction and mental health concerns. The agreement was signed January 14 during a regular meeting of the board. The newly established WVMPHP is an independent, not for profit 501(c)3 corporation, which operates independently of its parent organizations or the State Board of Medicine and State Board of Osteopathy. The WVMPHP now has a formal agreement authorizing it to monitor physicians, podiatrists and physician assistants "while they pursue treatment and recovery for alcohol or substance abuse or dependency or major mental illness." The legislation allows for confidential participation without the full knowledge of either board if treatment is related to self-administration of alcohol and other drugs and there is no evidence of patient harm. Physicians under investigation of either board may also be enrolled in the program while the appropriate board continues to investigate and/or take disciplinary action against the physician. When any physician enters the program, staff will check for any known board action against him or her.

Dr. Joseph Selby, immediate past president of the WVSMA, is chair of the WVMPHP Board, and Dr. P. Bradley Hall is the medical director. The program is housed in the WVSMA office building in Charleston and has already begun providing services to physicians statewide. They are currently in discussions with the Board of Osteopathy to provide the same services to their licensees.

For more information about the West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program, contact P. Bradley Hall, MD, medical director, or Renee Green, RN, case manager.