

Rethinking Physician Health and Well-Being Programs: Building Trust Through Confidential Support

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In the high-stress world of medicine, physicians' mental health and well-being are often overlooked. Physician/provider health programs (PHPs) were established by physician and health care worker regulatory boards and were introduced with the noble intention of providing support to struggling doctors. They also serve as objective assessors of competency to oversight boards. Unfortunately, this has led to a reported lack of trust among clinicians and an apprehension to voluntarily seek assistance from PHPs.

There is a better way forward: medical societies. Medical societies can offer earlier intervention and confidential mental health and well-being resources, fostering trust and support within the health care community.

The importance of oversight and accountability

First, it is important to mention that regulatory boards play a vital role in supporting the well-being of health care professionals and the safety of patients. They offer significant and unique benefits:

- **Specialized care:** PHPs often provide specialized care tailored to the unique needs of health care professionals. This may include access to addiction specialists, psychiatrists, therapists, and other health care personnel experienced in treating physicians. Such specialized care ensures that clinicians receive the support and treatment necessary for their specific challenges.
- **Accountability and monitoring:** For clinicians dealing with substance use or other issues that may impact patient safety, regulatory boards offer structured monitoring and accountability measures.
- **Rehabilitation and reintegration:** These organizations play a crucial role in facilitating rehabilitation and the reintegration of clinicians into practice following treatment. They provide support and guidance throughout the recovery process, helping physicians, physician assistants (PAs), nurses, and other professionals navigate the challenges of returning to work while maintaining their health and well-being.

Lack of early intervention and confidentiality

Although PHPs are a vital piece in the continuum of care and were established



to assist physicians dealing with substance use, the possibility of escalation to mandatory reporting to medical licensing boards further adds to the unease, discouraging physicians, PAs, and other health care workers from seeking the help they desperately need. Most PHPs are not designed to offer daily career fatigue, mental health, and well-being resources needed to ensure clinicians do not reach distress levels.

Building trust through confidential support

National, state, specialty, and local medical societies, like ASA, play a pivotal role in reshaping the narrative around clinician

well-being. Career fatigue, moral injury challenges, and burnout are great concerns to the profession. As a country, we must find innovative ways to save our health care workers' lives and end professional fatigue and burnout while addressing the rapidly rising tide of moral injury, attrition, and suicide.

ASA's member resource: SafeHaven

ASA offers a new, confidential clinician well-being program, SafeHaven, to anesthesiologists and care team members nationwide. SafeHaven ensures clinicians can seek support for burnout, career fatigue, and mental health reasons without the fear of undue repercussions to their medical license.

By offering new legal protections (varies by state) and clarity around reporting requirements as well as confidential mental health and well-being resources, including counseling, peer coaching, parent coaching, and more, physicians can seek support without fear of repercussion.



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SafeHaven is one of the most robust and comprehensive set of well-being resources available to clinicians and other licensed providers today and is spreading across the country as the newest standard of early intervention for burnout.

Some interventions might require the leverage inherent in most PHPs for clinicians to seek or receive treatment; however, we believe less than 10% of the health care workforce needs this intense level of intervention. Health care must offer more options for the other 90% of its professionals, and SafeHaven is an important part of that developing ecosystem.

Advocacy, confidentiality, and robust well-being resources

Unlike PHPs which are often perceived as disciplinary mechanisms, medical societies are serving as supportive entities focused on the holistic well-being of physicians and their teams through SafeHaven. This elevation of the mission and approach can help break barriers, offering the psychological safety necessary to encourage more clinicians to proactively address their mental health needs. By prioritizing protection, psychological safety, and support, medical societies are fostering a culture of openness and empowerment within the medical community.

In addition to providing direct support, ASA is serving as an advocate for systemic change within the health care industry. By raising awareness about the importance of physician well-being and advocating for policies that prioritize protected mental health support, these societies are driving meaningful reform and strengthening relationships with those they serve.

By shifting the focus to early intervention, confidential support, and leveraging the resources and influence of medical societies like ASA, we can create a more supportive and empowering environment for physicians and care team members to ensure they do not reach the point of needing mandatory interventions directed by oversight boards. ■

The SafeHaven program is available to you and your family members with confidential resources that include peer and parent coaching, counseling, virtual concierge, legal/financial resources, online work/life tools, a mobile app, and more.

Each subscription is \$149 per clinician with benefits access through November 2025. This introductory offer is made possible by the ASA Charitable Foundation for the first 500 enrollees. Thereafter, pricing will be charged at \$333 per clinician.

Explore program details at asahq.org/safehaven.

