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Washington Medical Commission

UPDATE!

Promoting patient safety and enhancing the integrity of the profession through licensing, discipline, rule making, and education.

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Fostering a Resilient and Thriving Healthcare Workforce

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This year, Washington Physicians Health Program (WPHP) refreshed our mission statement to better reflect our purpose: WPHP is Washington's trusted resource for restoring the health of medical professionals. Our confidential support and exceptional outcomes provide reassurance of safe practice and promote workforce sustainability.

For over 35 years, WPHP has remained an independent, physician-led nonprofit, providing vital assistance to Washington's healthcare professionals. We serve osteopathic physicians, allopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, physician assistants, dentists, veterinarians, and students and residents in these fields. Our vision is to advance the health and well-being of our medical community.

Confidential Help, Reassurance of Safe Practice

WPHP assists healthcare professionals with any health condition that may affect safe clinical practice. We offer early intervention, assessment, treatment referral, and post-treatment health support for those in the medical workforce with conditions that may negatively impact practice performance. In some cases, brief assessment and referral to services are all that is needed to support health and put concerns at rest. In other cases, more help is needed and WPHP is ready to assist.

Referral to WPHP protects the well-being of healthcare professionals and the patients they serve. Healthy medical professionals means having better care, decreased medical errors, increased patient satisfaction, lower malpractice rates, and better treatment outcomes overall.

WPHP's Key Outcomes

WPHP consistently receives high ratings for program service and satisfaction from participants and stakeholders. About half of those referred to WPHP receive support and advocacy without the need to enroll in a health support agreement. Approximately 85-90% of those receiving WPHP services do so without any knowledge or involvement of their licensing board.

WPHP is highly effective with 91% of program participants reporting needing and benefiting from WPHP advocacy. Nearly 87% of our program participants describe their WPHP experience as extremely useful or lifesaving. At program completion, 83% of participants are working in their field and nearly 90% of colleagues report that WPHP is a valuable resource to the medical community.

Other Significant Findings

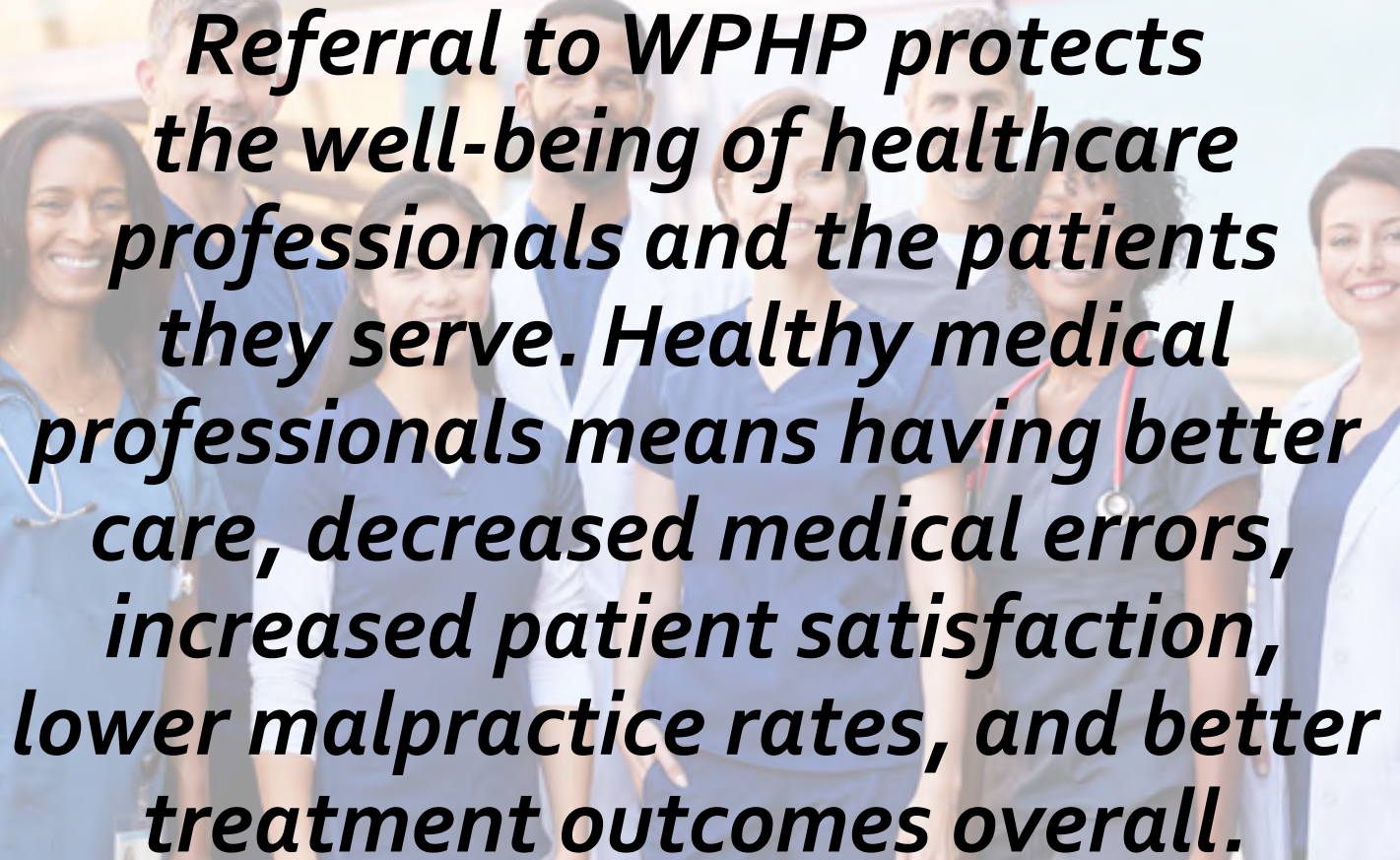
WPHP program participants have consistently reported substantially lower rates of burnout than other physicians. While the current rate of burnout among physicians nationally is around 50%, less than 20% of WPHP participants report experiencing burnout. This is striking considering that many of the mental health conditions that bring physicians and PAs to WPHP are associated with increased burnout. Approximately 85% of WPHP's program participants are in full remission of health condition at discharge. Twelve- and sixty-month abstinence rate for WPHP participants with substance use disorders is at 92% and 87% respectively.

Suicide Awareness and Prevention

WPHP considers physician suicide awareness and prevention an important priority – one in which we are leading efforts at state and national levels. Through our education and outreach mission, WPHP strives to provide accurate information about physician suicide as well as resources to support physicians, physician assistants, veterinarians, and dentists with health conditions that are associated with suicide. WPHP has a long-standing commitment to addressing suicide among healthcare professionals and considers it a continuing privilege to serve the medical community and to be recognized nationally for our expertise and advocacy in addressing physician suicide.

At the individual level, for program participants, WPHP's suicide risk assessment and management protocols are a model among physician health programs. While suicide risk assessment has limited utility in predicting suicide, it can help identify appropriate targets of therapeutic intervention. This represents a shift in focus from "risk assessment" to "needs assessment."

Every referral call to WPHP is screened for concerns of suicide and all intake assessments include the empirically validated Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale Screen Version. Positive screens undergo comprehensive suicide risk assessment by licensed mental health professionals and are staffed with one of our program psychiatrists. Program participants are asked about thoughts of hopelessness and suicide during any encounter where a clinically relevant increase in distress is observed. Acute distress or exacerbation of illness triggers communication with the participant's care team, identification of unmet needs, and linkages to additional resources and support as indicated.



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WPHP Advocacy and Credentialing Reform

Advocacy continues to be a focus for WPHP and we are making strides in advocating for license and credentialing question reforms and preserving WPHP protections in the public records act. Recently, WPHP collaborated on a groundbreaking development in healthcare credentialing, led by Dr. Brian Johnston of UW Medicine. This landmark reform has set a new standard for credentialing processes, placing a strong emphasis on the well-being and mental health of healthcare professionals.

WPHP played a critical role in providing consultation and technical assistance throughout this initiative, helping UW Medicine align their credentialing procedures with best practices that support the health and sustainability of their workforce. By integrating comprehensive well-being measures into the credentialing process, UW Medicine has demonstrated a deep commitment to the mental health of their physicians and healthcare teams. Some of the key tools involved in this reform include the Peer Reference Form, the Washington Practitioner Application, and the Medical Staff Reappointment Application, all designed to streamline the credentialing process while focusing on practitioner well-being.

This reform serves as a model for other healthcare institutions, not just within Washington but across the country. It highlights how a thoughtful, well-supported credentialing process can promote the long-term wellness and success of healthcare professionals.

To learn more about WPHP or make a referral, please call 800-552-7236 or visit wphp.org.