

Wisconsin Health Professionals
Health Services Program
(HPHSP)

The program is being created by the Wisconsin Medical Society, for the benefit of physicians, dentists, pharmacists and ultimately all health professionals. Our colleagues suffer from stress, substance abuse, alcoholism, depression etc. as much or more as anyone else. When we are struggling, we can put patients at risk. The HPHSP is set up so health professionals can seek help, without risk. Entering into the HPHSP will protect the license to practice of health professionals, while they go through the program. Professionals who complete such a program have a lower risk of impaired performance or putting patients at risk, than the profession as a whole. These programs work.

The Wisconsin HPHSP is modeled after the best programs in the country, especially the program in Ohio. Physicians in Ohio have a small surcharge added to their license fee, to fund the program. What will be different here in Wisconsin is that we are setting up the program to become available to all health professionals. When we have complete funding through the state, by adding the cost to our license fees, it is designed to be free for all participants.

But the program failed to get through the most recent legislative session. The issue that stopped it was getting approval from the professional societies of the other professions: dentists, psychologists, pharmacists, nurses, etc. They objected to the surcharge for the license fee.

We have to build a consensus with our colleagues to support this program. It is intended to help all of us and protect our patients. In my opinion, we must get this program across the finish line, this year. We received a \$2.5 million grant to establish the program. That grant was needed to setup the program, but does not fund the operation going forward. It needs sustainable funding. The bill that failed to get to the floor this year would have completed that process. We will work to build support from the other professional societies. We didn't succeed the first time, so we shall try again.

In the meantime, I propose we build a fund to jump start the operational support for the program. We have a 501c(3) nonprofit organization established. La Crosse County Medical Society has led the way with a \$5,000 grant to the program. I matched that grant with my own contribution of over \$5,000. We estimate it will take about one million dollars for the first year, if we cover only physicians. The current estimate for a program that would also extend the program to dentists and pharmacists for the first year would cost about \$2.5 million.

I propose we lead the way and solicit contributions to the fund from everyone we know. Let's jump start the fund and the program. When we go to the other societies, and to the legislature, we will be able to point to our efforts at fund raising and show we are serious about making this work. If the program gets full funding via the license surcharge process, we will have a fiscal reserve that will prevent interruption in the program, should there ever be a delay in funding from the state.

Please join me in supporting our effort to help our fellow health professionals and protect our patients. Donate any amount of money you are comfortable giving. If every doctor who is a member of the medical society donated just \$250, it would fund the program for the first year. For resident physicians and retired physicians, that is not a trivial cost. But if we get tens of thousands of small donors, that number can be reached. I propose to ask all my friends and family members to make small contributions I will ask my local dentists and pharmacists and even business associates. Everyone can afford to make a small contribution. Let's make this happen.

Here is the QR code to donate:



Please join me!

Michael J. White, MD