



VERMONT PRACTITIONER HEALTH PROGRAM 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

Vermont Practitioner Health Program Operations

Introduction

The Vermont Practitioner Health Program (VPHP) is a health service of the Vermont Medical Society created for the benefit of Vermont's health professionals. Its purpose is to identify, assess, evaluate, and ensure effective treatment for clinicians whose ability to practice medicine is impaired, or is at the risk of becoming impaired. Physicians (including M.D.s and D.O.s), podiatrists, medical trainees, radiology assistants, anesthesia assistants and physician assistants are eligible to participate. VPHP assists practitioners dealing with impairment or risk of impairment due to use of drugs, including alcohol, as well as impairment caused by any factor that interferes with cognition, judgment, or behavior. This includes mental health challenges and organic causes of cognitive impairment.

Finances

VPHP receives partial financial support under a contract with the Vermont Board of Medical Practice (VBMP), based on legislation in 2000 that established funding of the program through a surcharge to Board of Medical Practice licensees' licensing fees. In 2017, the statute was amended to include any medical condition that has the potential to impair a licensee of the VBMP's ability to practice medicine. Funding through the VBMP also increased at that time. VPHP receives further financial support from income of the VMS Faulkner Trust Fund, which provides for the health and wellbeing of physicians in the State of Vermont. In 2022, VPHP also solicited and received donations from Medical Mutual Insurance Company of Maine, Coverys Insurance, the University of Vermont Health Network's Captive Insurance Company and from Dartmouth Health.

Program Staff

The Medical Director for the majority of 2022, Joseph Lasek, M.D., is a psychiatrist with expertise, training and experience in substance abuse and mental health. The Medical Director oversees all clinical aspects of the program. Dr. Lasek assumed the VPHP Medical Director position in July 2019. Program Administrator, Colleen Magne, performs all day-to-day management functions for the program. Jessa Barnard, Executive Director of the Vermont Medical Society, provides strategic and legal oversight for the program and program staff. Dr. Lasek resigned from VPHP in December 2022 and the Vermont Medical Society hired Nels

Kloster, M.D. Dr. Kloster is also a psychiatrist with expertise in substance abuse and mental health. The VPHP looks forward to working with Dr. Kloster.

VPHP Committee

Currently a 10-member VPHP Committee, approved by the VMS Board, serves in an advisory capacity to the Medical Director of VPHP on clinical and program matters. The Committee is structured as a peer review committee with the accompanying legal protections of participants' confidentiality and includes nine physicians and one licensed mental health and drug and alcohol counselor. Committee members are knowledgeable about the impact that practitioner health matters have on health care. The Committee meets at least 10 times during the course of the calendar year.

Participating in VPHP

Anyone can contact VPHP with referrals, including practitioners who refer themselves. Referrals come from colleagues, family members, friends, hospitals, and the Board of Medical Practice. Inquiries to the phone lines are responded to promptly and efficiently. When an individual contacts VPHP, the Medical Director assesses the situation and determines the next steps, which may include an assessment of impairment by the Medical Director and, if indicated based on the assessment, a referral for a more in-depth inpatient or outpatient evaluation by a third party evaluator. The Medical Director also assists in guiding the referral source to other treatment or community resources, if needed. The evaluation would include any recommendations for treatment and follow-up care.

If monitoring is indicated based on the results of an evaluation, practitioners are encouraged to enter a VPHP monitoring contract. The monitoring contract specifies a course of treatment and documents the progress of recovery. The standard contract may include individual therapy, group support meetings, and regular meetings with a designated VPHP peer advisor (formerly known as case manager); random urine, hair, nail, blood, or breathalyzer testing; treatment with an addictionologist/psychiatrist; and the oversight of a practice monitor who interacts with the practitioner on a regular basis. RecoveryTrek provides administration for the testing of hair, nail, blood, and urine. VPHP offers testing through Quest Diagnostics and United States Drug Testing Laboratories Inc. (USDTL). Participants also have the option to test at home with the Proof testing of urine, blood, and nails. VPHP also utilizes the Soberlink breathalyzer system for participants that are diagnosed with alcohol dependence.

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of the Vermont Practitioner Health Program. VPHP recognizes the importance of respecting the privacy of those who come forward to seek help, and VPHP is committed to devoting its resources to protect that privacy. Participation in VPHP is confidential, unless the Board of Medical Practice is involved with the practitioner's case or other reporting requirements under a participant's contract are triggered. VPHP telephone and fax lines are confidential. Electronic mail is encrypted.

VPHP is a member of, and participates in, the Federation of State Physician Health Programs. FSPHP members participate in an email list serve, and attend regional and national conferences, all of which serve as a forum for advice, sharing of resources and input from other PHPs throughout the USA and Canada.

The Year in Review

The Vermont Practitioner Health Program has completed its twenty-second year of operation. The program continues to improve and develop high standards of identifying and supervising practitioners who are at risk of or currently have impairments in practicing medicine. Calls and referrals to VPHP remained steady during 2022. COVID-19 did present challenges to outreach due to the lack of in-person meetings though VPHP did complete a few meetings during 2022, which are indicated below.

Program Participation January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022

VPHP recognition continues to grow in the state of Vermont and, with increased recognition and promotion from the VMS leadership and membership, inquiries have been consistent. The confidential phone line is also used for providing information and to answer any questions regarding the program, including the availability of treatment facilities and monitoring options. When VPHP receives calls that relate to issues outside the scope of our program, we make every attempt to refer those professionals to other appropriate resources in the medical or counseling community.

The following provides a breakdown of types of new practitioner contacts handled during 2022:

- # Of intake assessments performed by VPHP: 21
- # Of referrals by the VBMP: 16
- # Of referrals by other means including self and transfers from other PHPs: 4
- # Of assessments/evaluations that resulted in a contract with VPHP: 3
- # Of participants contracted with VPHP in 2022: 13
- # Of participants that successfully completed monitoring in 2022: 5
- # Of dropouts or program failures: 0
- # Of professionals determined to be candidates for monitoring but refused: 0
- # Of reportable or non-reportable relapses by contracted professionals: 0

- # Of phone calls related to concerns about impairment in a practitioner: 16

2022 Outreach

In 2022 in-person outreach opportunities were still reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Vermont Practitioner Health Program provided the following education and outreach to the medical community:

Updated and printed VPHP brochures for Board of Medical Practice

March 2022, Ms. Barnard and VMS President educated Central Vermont Medical Center CMO on VMS programs, including VPHP

May & June 2022, Ms. Barnard educated new VMS Board members about VMS programs, including VPHP

In July 2022, Dr. Lasek and Ms. Magne attended a dinner meeting with the UVM COM anesthesiology residents to discuss substance use disorder in the practice of anesthesiology.

Sept-Oct 2022, multiple postings in VMS, Vermont Psychiatric Association and other specialty society newsletters about VPHP medical director position and including background educational information about the VPHP program

In November 2022, Ms. Magne gave a program update to the Vermont Medical Society board of directors on the Vermont Practitioner Health Program.

December 2022, VMS member newsletter and website announcements about new medical director and VPHP services

In 2022 VPHP and its committee members meet monthly to discuss policy updates and VPHP participants. The exception to this was August 2022 as there was no meeting.

In 2022 VPHP had 9 VPHP participants join the monthly VPHP Committee Meeting.

2022 Case Management Committee Members

- Joseph Lasek, MD: VPHP Medical Director/ Nels Kloster, MD: VPHP Medical Director
- John Valentine, MD: Internal Medicine and Oncology, Roxbury, VT, Committee Chair, Retired
- George Linton, MD: Geriatrics, Montgomery, VT, Retired
- Patrick Mahoney M.D., Orthopedic Surgeon, South Burlington, VT, Retired
- Richard Marasa, M.D., Emergency Medicine, Springfield, VT

