

Executive Vice President’s Message

Physician Health and Wellness in Nebraska



By Amy Reynoldson
NMA Executive Vice President

The NMA has been actively working to strengthen the resources available that will help achieve optimal health and wellness for our physicians, including keeping physicians mentally and physically healthy, retaining

the physician workforce to maintain access to care for patients, and addressing the stigma amongst physicians seeking support for their own health needs.

The two main programs currently being implemented or strengthened across the country focus on physician *wellness* and physician *health*.

The National Wellness Institute defines wellness as a conscious, self-directed, and evolving process of achieving full potential. Margaret Swarbrick outlined in her article *A Wellness Approach* that wellness involves attempting to fully integrate and balance approximately eight dimensions including intellectual, emotional, physical, environmental, financial, occupational, spiritual, and social. When any of these dimensions are suboptimal, wellness is likely being compromised.

As many of you know, the Nebraska Medical Association launched a statewide physician wellness program, LifeBridge Nebraska, in August 2020 to provide a resource for physicians to access when they experience an imbalance in their wellness. This program aims to promote self-care and stress-management techniques, foster a culture of wellness within health care organizations, provide education and training, and offer

personalized peer coaching support to help physicians navigate the challenges unique to their careers.

LifeBridge Nebraska is a confidential, voluntary, self-referral program intended to be an upstream preventative coaching model for physicians to access at any time for any reason, ultimately to help maintain their physical and emotional well-being.

Nearly all other states, except Nebraska and Wisconsin, have a companion program in place: a Physician *Health*

Program (PHP). A PHP is an effective resource available for physicians

or those in training suffering from addictive, psychiatric, medical, behavioral, or potentially impairing conditions. PHPs

address physicians

at risk for impairment through a confidential and evidence-based model that connects

physicians to treatment and provides monitoring services separate from the licensing board.

PHPs are highly effective in coordinating early detection, evaluation, treatment, and continuing care monitoring of physicians with these conditions. Individuals may avoid mandatory reporting to the regulatory board if there is no risk to patient safety and obtain treatment without fear of public knowledge. A PHP serves as an alternative path to discipline where the program allows the physician to access services to receive treatment and necessary support to return to safely practicing medicine.

The DHHS Board of Medicine and Surgery members have discussed the need to have a PHP off and on over the last few years and voted unanimously on January 27, 2023, to support the formation of a Nebraska physician health program. Since that meeting, the NMA and

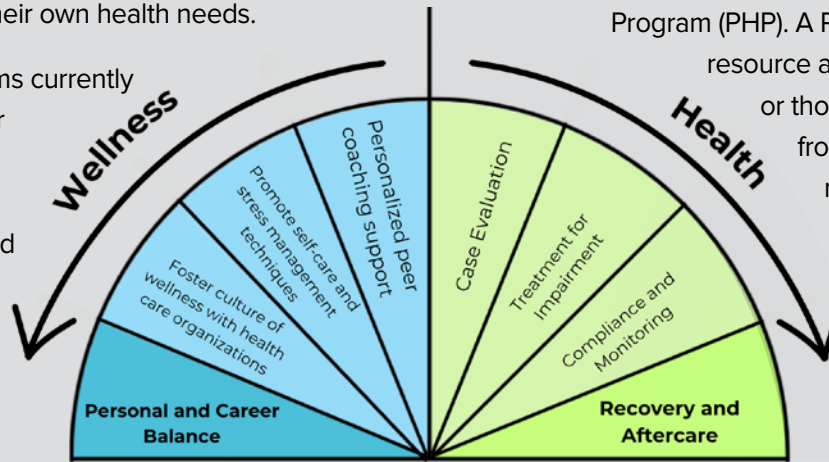


Figure 1

the Board of Medicine and Surgery members have discussed the best way to proceed.

The NMA has joined the Federation of State Physician Health Programs as a member and is getting acquainted with other programs and professionals across the country to learn more about each program and what model would work best in Nebraska. PHPs have been in place in many states for nearly forty years. They have solid outcomes that help physicians maintain their profession, practice safely, and serve their patients effectively. They offer a highly effective, trusted, confidential model for assisting and advocating for physicians.

Health and wellness programs can be viewed as a continuum, see Figure 1. It is common for physicians involved in a PHP to also engage in a wellness program, working to achieve optimal balance of their wellness and health.

We know that going upstream and taking a preventative approach is effective, so we encourage physicians to engage in LifeBridge Nebraska when they recognize an imbalance with their wellness and before the physician jeopardizes patient safety and their ability to practice medicine safely. Nebraska is halfway there with the wellness program in place and serving physicians. We are prioritizing efforts to establish a PHP by working with all stakeholders to make it available so physicians can access a program that provides confidential oversight and coordination of treatment and monitoring, without the fear of discipline and public scrutiny. Our physicians deserve to have access to the entire continuum of resources available, just like those physicians practicing in the other forty-eight states.

To learn more about LifeBridge Nebraska, please visit lifebridgenebraska.org/.

SAVE

FRIDAY,
AUGUST 16
2024

DATE

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SUITES**
LaVista, NE