

Confidentiality

According to state and federal law and ISMA program policies, all participant information is confidential. Only in rare instances is the program required to report a physician to the Medical Licensing Board of Indiana. Also, only under limited circumstances can the program be compelled to disclose information to third parties.

Often, related parties (e.g., a partner or hospital personnel) request information regarding a program participant. With the participant's consent, periodic progress reports can be sent. However, information is not released to these entities without the participant's permission.

Indiana Law

Indiana law empowers the ISMA Physician Assistance Program and other similar committees to intervene on an impaired physician and insist on appropriate treatment. Indiana Code 844 IAC 5-2-8 states that as long as an impaired physician follows the prescribed treatment plan, no reporting to the Medical Licensing Board of Indiana is required.

If, however, an impaired physician fails to comply with the course of treatment or make satisfactory progress, the ISMA program staff must report this information to the executive committee of the hospital, which in turn must report the non-compliance to the Medical Licensing Board of Indiana. Or the ISMA program staff can report such violations directly to the Medical Licensing Board.

For assistance, please call 1-800-257-4762 or 317-261-2060 and ask for the Physician Assistance Program staff. For additional information, visit our Web site at www.ismanet.org/resources/assistance/index.htm.



ISMA Physician Assistance Program

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Physician Assistance Program

- A Resource for Physicians

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The Indiana State Medical Association (ISMA) Physician Assistance Program was created to assist physicians experiencing difficulties in their personal or professional lives.

Experience indicates that an untreated psychiatric, substance abuse or stress disorder can eventually lead to problems in the medical practice. Obtaining assistance during these troubled times can be of benefit to the physician personally and can help avert a crisis in the professional workplace. Help is only a phone call away.

Program Services

The ISMA program addresses a range of concerns including:

- Alcohol and drug use disorders
- Mental health disorders
- Disruptive behavior
- Physical illnesses

Program Elements

- Screening and referral
- Consultation for physician health-related concerns
- Case management designed to provide support and accountability to the physician
- Advocacy services to provide reports (at the physician's request) to outside sources (e.g., credentialing committees)
- Education on physician health-related concerns

How to Refer

Physicians concerned about their personal health and well-being or that of a colleague may contact our program for a free and confidential consultation. Additionally, any hospital, hospital committee, partner group, practice manager or others who may have oversight responsibilities for physicians are encouraged to contact our program to arrange an initial screening.

Common Warning Signs

Some common signs of distress at the office and hospital include:

Office

- Disruption of appointment schedule
- Hostile, withdrawn or unreasonable behavior toward patients and staff
- Excessive ordering of prescription drugs by mail or from local pharmacies
- Patient complaints regarding physician's behavior
- Unexplained absence from office or absence due to frequent illnesses

Hospital

- Making rounds late or inappropriately or odd behavior during rounds
- Decrease in quality of performance (e.g., incomplete charts)
- Increase in number of quality assurance errors
- Reports of behavioral changes from hospital personnel
- Reports from emergency room staff of unavailability or inappropriate response to telephone calls
- Attending emergency patients while appearing under the influence
- Frequently late for surgery and meetings
- Reports of incoherent phone orders, slurred speech, etc.
- Deterioration in appearance and dress habits

Community

- Isolated and withdrawn from community activities, leisure activities or church
- Embarrassing behavior at clubs or parties
- Unpredictable behavior (e.g., excessive spending, gambling)
- Arrests for driving while intoxicated, disorderly conduct

Signs of Disruptive Behavior

Some possible signs of the behaviorally disruptive physician include:

- Inappropriate anger or resentments (e.g., intimidation, abusive language, blaming or shaming others, or threats of violence or retribution)
- Inappropriate words or actions directed at others (e.g., sexual comments or harassment, seductive or aggressive behavior or ethnic slurs)
- Inappropriate responses to patient or staff needs (e.g., chronic late responses to pages or calls, unprofessional conduct, defiance as an approach to problems)