Best Practices and Support for Physician Assistant Impairment

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Welcome

* Introductions
  Name
  Job/Title/Location
  State your reasons for becoming a Physician Assistant

Objectives

1. Define professional knowledge of an impaired physician.
2. Discuss AAPA guidelines regarding impairment of healthcare professionals.
4. Understand need for support to assist Physician Assistants with chronic illnesses and drug/alcohol addiction.
5. Develop best practices in establishing impairment committees and cooperative networks in the workplace and PA community.
**Definition of Physician Assistant Impairment**

- Any physical, mental, or behavioral condition that interferes with the ability to safely engage in professional activities. This includes the deterioration of cognitive functioning in aging medical healthcare providers.
- Performance of clinical and professional activities while impaired may be due to an acute and/or chronic illness and/or progressive substance use disorder.

**Responsibilities of a Physician Assistant (PA)**

- Recognize own impairment and identifying and assisting impaired colleagues who are unable to practice with reasonable skill and safety to patients.
- Identify the observable behaviors that may be due to a physical, mental, and/or progressive substance use disorder.
- Assist the impaired colleague to speak to the supervisor and obtain resources and referrals for health and wellness at the workplace, PA organizations, and PA referral sources.

**Ethical Conduct**

- PAs have an ethical responsibility to protect patients and the public by identifying and assisting impaired colleagues.
- "Impaired" means being unable to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety because of physical or mental illness, loss of motor skills, loss of cognitive functioning, or excessive use or abuse of drugs and alcohol.
- PAs should be able to recognize impairment in physician supervisors, PAs, and other health care providers and should encourage them to seek assistance from appropriate resources to encourage individuals to obtain treatment.
§185.22. Impaired Physician Assistants.

(a) Mental or physical examination requirement.

(1) The board may require a licensee/applicant to submit to a mental and/or physical examination by a physician or physicians designated by the board if the board has probable cause to believe that the licensee/applicant is impaired. Impairment is present if one appears to be unable to practice with reasonable skill and safety to patients by reason of age, illness, drunkenness, excessive use of drugs, narcotics, chemicals, or any other type of material; or as a result of any mental or physical condition.

(2) Probable cause may include, but is not limited to, any one of the following:

(A) sworn statements from two people, willing to testify before the board, the medical board, or the State Office of Administrative Hearings that a certain licensee/applicant is impaired;

(B) a sworn statement from an official representative of the Texas Academy of Physician Assistants stating that the representative is willing to testify before the board that a certain licensee/applicant is impaired;

(C) evidence that a licensee/applicant left a treatment program for alcohol or chemical dependency before completion of that program;

(D) evidence that a licensee/applicant is guilty of intemperate use of drugs or alcohol;

(E) evidence of repeated arrests of a licensee/applicant for intoxication;

(F) evidence of recurring temporary commitments of a licensee/applicant;

(G) medical records indicating that a licensee/applicant has an illness or condition which results in the inability to function properly in his or her practice; OR

(H) actions or statements by a licensee/applicant at a hearing conducted by the Board that gives the Board reason to believe that the licensee or applicant has an impairment.

TAC: 22:9:185.22

As a PA professional, **confidentially** share your concerns with your immediate supervisor.

Report incidents in behaviorally objective and neutral tones in describing behavior (Who, what, when, and where).

Be descriptive and non-emotional in describing behaviors.

Report ONLY observable behavior to supervisor.


Know the policy and procedures for impaired professionals at the workplace. Complete proper paperwork quickly.
Appropriate Course of Action for PA Supervisors & Managers

- Refer to state laws and workplace policy & procedures.
- Seek guidance of state level or local level professional societies, constituent organizations, and chapters.
- Depending on policy & procedures, refer to HR Employee Relations Consultant and HR Employee Assistance Program in timely manner.
- Best practice….for impaired worker to be relieved of duty immediately and go to employee health for BAT and urine testing to rule out “reasonable suspicion”. If employee refuses, document refusal and contact HR.

Appropriate Course of Action for PA Supervisors & Managers

- Best practice….worker returns to duty once BAT/Urine screen is negative OR goes to PCP for a return to work note OR HR recommends a “fit for duty” examination by third party forensic psychiatrist. Some companies require PA to go to EAP Counselor at 8 a.m. the next morning of incident for assessment.
- Some companies have own employee health MD. This depends on policy and procedure of company.
- Best practice….neutral, 3rd party, qualified physician to rule out mental, physical and/or substance abuse disorders.

Challenges to report “reasonable suspicion”

- Confidentiality
- Trust and respect of supervisor
- Fear of you or colleague losing job and license
- Stigma of having a physical or mental impairment
- You do not want to get involved and cause problems at work.
- Other challenges?
Anna-Kate is a 28 year old Physician Assistant that works with you in the clinics every day (M-F, 8-5). When at work, you observe her making errors in patient documentation and making inappropriate and unprofessional comments to her patients on 3 different occasions this week.

She is unusually chatty and does not seem to be aware of her comments and overly active behaviors. Her speech is rapid and erratic. She has missed 2 consecutive Mondays. The 2 absences on Mondays were unexcused absences as she did not call to inform that she was unable to come to work.

As her PA supervisor, what do you do?
As her PA colleague, what do you do?

Scenario 1: What do you do?

Observable Behaviors

- Ability to Stand
- Ability to walk
- Eyes
- Nose
- Face/Skin
- Other physical traits

- Mental State
- Demeanor
- Actions
- Speech
- Attendance
- Work Performance

Need for Support for Physical Assistant Impairment

- Report to proper regulatory office at workplace (HR & EAP).
- Find out Resources within your PA organizations and fellow colleagues.
- Suggest best Referral options at work, in-patient treatment facilities, and out-patient options.
- Support Recovery programs such as after work programs, AA, NA, and other support groups for chronic illnesses and other mental and medical impairments, both face-face and online support groups.
PA impairment committees:
- Enhance recognition of impairments
- Encourages early referral for appropriate treatment
- Promotes effective long-term monitoring
- Serves as advocates for restoring suspended practice privileges once an individual has completed a rehabilitation program
- Remain CONFIDENTIAL and protects identity of PA

Questions?
Comments?

Resources

TXPHP (Texas Physician Health Program)
http://www.txphp.state.tx.us/index.html
Texas Medical Association (Texas Medical Association)
http://www.texmed.org