

Title: Physicians' Health and Impairment

Approvers: Chief Medical Officer

Initiated: 8/2001

Last Approval Date: 9/2017

Reference: DNV MS.14

Responsible Department(s): Medical Staff

## **I. POLICY:**

HealthAlliance recognizes that the practitioner's health is an important aspect of patient safety. The Medical Staff is committed to providing safe, effective, timely and respectful medical care while fostering an environment that promotes practitioner health. The Medical Staff affirms that impairing conditions are frequently treatable illnesses and with treatment, practitioners can maintain the safe practice of medicine with appropriate monitoring. Under no circumstance will age or disability alone be a factor in determining clinical privileges or reappointment at HealthAlliance Hospitals.

A physician, resident, medical student, or physician assistant with physical or mental health concerns may be referred to the Committee for Physician's Health (CPH) of the New York State Medical Society. Referrals may be made by the Chief Medical Officer, a member of the Medical Staff or the practitioner may self-refer. Referrals are confidential and records are protected by New York State and Federal laws. CPH records are not discoverable and the law provides immunity from damages/monetary liability for those who make referrals. CPH will accept referral for concerns including mental health, substance abuse, other addictive disorders, cognitive disorders, organic brain disorders and disruptive behavior.

**II. DEFINITIONS:** For the purpose of this policy, physicians, residents, medical students and physician assistants are referred to as "practitioners."

**Impaired Physician** – An impaired physician is one who is unable to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety to patients because of a physical or mental illness, including deterioration through the aging process or loss of motor skill, or excessive use or abuse of drugs, including alcohol" (American Medical Association)

## **III. PROCEDURE:**

Recognizing that impairing conditions are illness, which may require treatment, practitioners are strongly encouraged to seek assistance before the illness progresses. **Practitioners may obtain confidential help for themselves and their colleagues by contacting the Committee for Physician Health (800-338-1833).**

1. The Medical Staff and patient care staff who recognize indicators of impairment in practitioners and other health professionals may report to Hospital Administration and Medical Staff leadership through the appropriate chain of command. Hospital staff members observing signs and symptoms of a practitioner which may be indicative of a

potentially impairing condition, should confidentially notify the Chief Medical Officer of their concerns. *Refer to Possible Indications of Impairment list below*

2. Once reported, the Chief Medical Officer in consultation with the President of the Medical Staff will meet with the practitioner to determine the validity of the report and/or the course of action needed.
3. To promote assistance and rehabilitation rather than discipline, practitioners requiring time away from their practice will be granted a medical leave of absence from his/her medical staff.
4. If the practitioner is referred to CPH, then CPH will coordinate appropriate treatment and notify the Chief Medical Officer when the practitioner is medically cleared for duty and appropriate monitoring is in place. Upon request, CPH will conduct a back-to-work conference with hospital staff to facilitate reentry into the work place. Once back in practice, CPH will monitor the practitioner to assure continued engagement in treatment and investment in recovery.
5. Those practitioners determined incapable of safely performing their clinical privileges, or who are diagnosed and refuse to seek treatment or fail to complete their treatment, shall be referred to Medical Executive Committee for appropriate corrective action ***or summary suspension as outlined in the Medical Staff Bylaws and*** strict adherence to any state or federally mandated reporting requirements.
6. Practitioners' health assessments are confidential medical records and will be maintained with restricted access separate from discipline or credential files. To promote confidentiality during medical staff appointment and reappointment, only the Chief Medical Officer will review the practitioner's health assessments.

Possible Indications of Impairment:

- Unkempt appearance, poor hygiene
- Trembling, slurred speech
- Bloodshot or bleary eyes
- Complaints by patients and nurses
- Arguments, bizarre behavior
- Irritability, depression, mood swings
- Irresponsibility, poor memory, poor concentration
- Unexplained accidents or injuries to self
- Neglect of family, isolation from friends
- DWI arrest or DUI violations
- Financial and/or legal problems
- Difficult to contact; won't answer phone or return calls
- Swindling medical practice
- Missed appointments, unexplained absences
- Rounds at irregular times
- Loss of interest in professional activities, social or community affairs
- Neglect of patients, incomplete charting, or neglect of other medical staff duties

- Inappropriate treatment of dangerous orders
- Excessive prescription writing
- Unusually high doses or wastage noted in drug logs
- Noticeable dependency on alcohol or drugs to relieve stress
- Intoxicated at social events or odor of alcohol on breath while on duty

Reference: CPH-MSSNY