

PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT
FEDERATION OF STATE PHYSICIANS HEALTH PROGRAMS
ADOPTED: 10/28/2000

Recommendations for length of monitoring by state physician health programs of physicians with substance use disorders.

Background:

The purpose of monitoring is to support physicians in recovery, monitor their success and intervene with difficulties during the period in which such physicians are cementing their recovery lifestyle and commitment to sobriety and in so doing protect the public. Based on the collective clinical experience of the FSPHP members, long-term recovery from substance use disorder is routinely achieved after five years of successful monitored recovery. Similarly, after 5 years of monitored recovery, such physicians usually are successful in managing further problems in their recovery through the use of their extensive support networks. The FSPHP further recognizes that exceptional cases exist, in which appropriate monitoring duration is either more or less than the five years. Therefore decisions may appropriately be made, clinically, on a case-by-case basis.

Because there is neither scientific data nor clinical experience that supports any advantage to the recovering physician or to the public – of continuing mandatory monitoring beyond five years, the FSPHP recommends that physicians with five years of successful recovery be treated like any other physician in terms of confirming they are substance free.

The FSPHP is committed to amending this policy as more definitive scientific data is gathered that sheds light on this subject.

Recommendations:

- The period of five years is adopted as the accepted guideline for length of professional monitoring of physicians who are in recovery from substance use disorders. Physician licensing and regulatory bodies, credentialing bodies, professional liability insurance companies and other organizations whose responsibility it is to insure physicians' safety to practice medicine, should adopt this guideline.
- State physician health programs may individualize these guidelines on a case-by-case basis to accommodate unusual circumstances.
- After five years of successful recovery (as determined by the state physician health program) from substance use disorders, physicians should be treated in a fashion similar to other physicians in terms of confirming that they are drug free.
- The FSPHP encourages physicians in recovery from substance use disorders to continue voluntary monitoring of their recovery for as long as they or their state physician health program think it would be useful.

CAUTIONARY STATEMENT

The Federation of State Physician Health Programs (FSPHP) believes there is currently insufficient scientific data to determine the ideal length of time that physicians suffering from substance use disorders should be monitored by their state physician health programs. The FSPHP proposes these guidelines to enhance uniform levels of monitoring for physicians within the purview of the Federation of Boards of Medical Examiners. These criteria reflect a clinical consensus of the professional monitoring programs active within the FSPHP at this time.