



A “Sick” Physician—Finds Help & Serenity: His Story

I was born of highly educated parents into a middle class family where there was no drinking, smoking or drug abuse (prescription or non-prescription). Despite little emotional support at home we received privileged private school educations.

All three of us were successful and all three of us were addicts of some sort. Though far from down and out my sister committed suicide at the age of thirty-five and my brother is a functioning, reclusive alcoholic who I have not seen for over twenty (20) years. I did not have a drink until I was eighteen (18) years old. Suddenly I found the magical comfort I was seeking my first spiritual awakening.

I completed medical school and residency without difficulty despite being a binge drinker. Once free of the constraints of formal supervision, my drinking escalated and became continuous and pathologic. I managed to practice medicine successfully and hid my drinking well; but it was only a matter of time before a personal or professional disaster would have occurred. My health was already failing; I had constant emotional and physical pain and was psychologically tortured.

What Happened

Fortunately the hospital staff became aware and concerned about my alcoholism and even more fortunate, they had a plan in place for such a situation. Thankfully, they had contacted the West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program for

assistance and guidance. Dr. P. Bradley Hall the program’s Director, contacted me in a respectful and professional manner instructing me to stop practicing immediately and assisted me in getting professional help. Not without a struggle fraught with denial, I voluntarily and confidentially agreed to an evaluation and referral for treatment. I then entered a fourteen (14) week program of inpatient rehabilitation at a treatment center specializing in substance abuse and mental illness occurring in the healthcare professional.

Because of the West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program’s intervention, recommended evaluation and treatment, I received help with my alcoholism prior to any adverse impact on anyone beyond myself, formal licensing issues or a report to the National Practitioner’s Data Bank which would have followed me forever. Luckily, I received the assistance I needed prior to any impact on my practice.

I returned to my practice, part-time, after a continued period of absence following discharge from rehabilitation and gradually returned to full-time status as my treatment professionals and the WVMPHP felt I was ready. I attended almost daily A.A. meetings, weekly Caduceus meetings (a closed meeting of health care professionals in recovery), weekly individual therapy sessions with either a psychologist or psychiatrist and random, weekly, urine drug screenings for mind and/or mood-altering substances including alcohol.

On one occasion, I screened positive for the weight reducing adjunct of the stimulant class (Phentermine). This positive test occurred within days of a one-time dose. Though this was a single event, there were significant adjustments to the treatment and monitoring of my recovery. Additionally, I voluntarily reduced my work hours. I would like to emphasize the benefit of this early detection and associated adjustments to what I thought was a balanced life-style of work and recovery. Though stimulants were not my “Drug of Choice,” any mind or mood-altering substance could have led to an alcohol relapse. Subsequently, the WVMPHP filed report of non-compliance to my licensure board. As result of the administrative process, I appeared before the Complaints Committee and the issue has been resolved.

What it is like now

It is wonderful! I am living life on life’s terms in recovery and safely practicing medicine again. I am no longer suffering the social, physical, emotional, spiritual and mental negative effects of alcoholism and have the tools of recovery and the WVMPHP to assist me in remaining sober. My disease of addiction is in full remission where I intend it to remain for the rest of my life....one day at a time.

Anonymous and Grateful, Recovering Alcoholic and Participant of the West Virginia Medical Professionals Health Program

Addiction medicine is a multi-disciplinary medical specialty practice of physicians who are trained in the prevention, evaluation, and treatment of addictive disorders. It has arisen as a specialty as a result of the recognition of addiction as a brain disease with a neurobiological basis, frequently with a genetic pre-disposition, generally chronic, progressive and relapsing in course, often fitting the paradigm of other chronic diseases such as asthma, depression, diabetes and hypertension. The recognition of the disease of addiction and associated co-morbidities impact on public health has continued to grow among the healthcare community. Addiction and related disorders are treated very successfully by a variety of interventions including pharmacotherapy, psychosocial therapies, and comprehensive case management.

The **TREATMENT** of the disease of addiction and associated co-morbidities **SAVES LIVES.**

P. Bradley Hall, M.D., *Medical Director, WVMPHP*