**Physician Impairment**

The American Medical Association defines an “impaired physician” as one who is unable to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety because of mental illness or excessive use or abuse of drugs, including alcohol. In general, physicians become impaired because of three major problems:

Substance Abuse: Alcohol is the most common problem. Abuse of narcotics, sedatives and other depressants as well as stimulants, including cocaine, may also occur. According to current estimates, 8% – 10% of physicians’ abuse alcohol and 2% abuse narcotics.

Psychological Problems: Too much stress and unhealthy responses to stress, depression and anxiety are the most common psychological causes of impairment. A life event, such as divorce or the death of a spouse or parent may precipitate a crisis.

Physical Illness: Physical ailments, either acute or chronic, and their treatments, can lead to incapacity.

**Well Being Committee**

The Medical Staff Well Being Committee is established to assist medical staff members who are impaired. An individual who suspects a physician of being impaired can submit a report to the Well-Being Committee Chair, the President, or the CEO via incident report. The observations should be factual and shall include a description of the incident(s) that led to the belief that the physician might be impaired. The individual making the report does not need to have proof of the impairment, but must state the facts that led to the suspicions.

**Signs of Impairment**

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| **Changes in personality, personal style**  Withdrawal, isolation, mistrust of others  Dropping out from professional activities  Unpredictable, erratic, inappropriate social behavior  Mood swings  Anger, antagonistic remarks or behavior | **Changes in work performance**  Disruption in established work habits  Inconsistent productivity  Cognitive errors such as wrong dates, word reversals, dosage errors, charting lapses  Procedural errors  Errors in omission with alibis, cover-ups, denials  Complaints from staff, patients, families  Forgetfulness | **Physical signs, complaints**  Lapses in personal hygiene  Agitation or restlessness  Drowsiness  Changes in speech  Depression |