



## Introducing the Practitioner Support Program

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I hope you and your families had a wonderful holiday season!

In this newsletter, I am introducing you to a new Washington Medical Commission (WMC) program, the Practitioner Support Program (PSP). The goal of this program is to help physicians and physician assistants (PAs) proactively address complaints and practice concerns through education and/or practice changes. PSP is not a disciplinary action and is not reportable to the National Practitioner Data Bank or the Federation of State Medical Boards.

The WMC considers the PSP for complaints focused on a single issue or root cause, such as record keeping or communication. Complaints related to allegations of patient harm, patterns of unprofessional conduct, impairment, violations of state and federal laws, and discrimination in health care are not eligible for the PSP program. The program is voluntary and provides complaint-specific educational references and access to WMC materials and offers educational resources to MDs/PAs to improve their practice. The program goal is to increase voluntary education and hopefully reduce future complaints to the WMC.

Post-COVID physician/PA shortages and high patient demand for services have made the practice of medicine more challenging. PSP is a focused way to provide medical education in matters that are important to patients and their families. The “soft” skills of patient and family communication/empathy and issues with the electronic medical records (EMR) now drive many complaints to the WMC.

Most complaints to the WMC are initiated by patients and/or family members via the WMC website.

Commissioners review complaints and discuss with WMC staff at a weekly Case Management Team (CMT) meeting to decide whether the complaint is closed or authorized for further investigation. The number of WMC complaints related to inadequate patient-centered communication now representing 25% of complaints. Communication issues also often underlie the 75% of complaints alleging substandard care.

Communication complaints sometimes allege bias based upon race, ethnicity, age, gender, and medical condition. Practitioners may not know that all people have implicit bias and may require more education on how to address this issue. “Not feeling heard” is also a frequent patient complaint, especially in discussions of life-threatening diseases and complications after medical treatments. The WMC has recommendations about how to best manage these difficult conversations. Other common complaints where a PSP is issued include patient inability to obtain medical records and termination of patient care including providing continuity of medications. Since the start of the program, 70% of PSPs involve improvement in patient-centered communication and 30% divided among EMR effectiveness, ethics, HIPAA rules, telehealth law, compassion, and cancer care (5% each).

The WMC is studying the impact of this new program on patient complaints. We are hopeful that this new program will help educate physicians and PAs to improve their practice, avoid having another complaint on the same issue, and given them the tools to provide the health care that they want to provide! For more information about the PSP, we encourage you to view our [recent webinar](#) on the topic and review the guidance document on the [WMC website](#).

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