

# **PAW: Physicians Advocating Wellness...** coming to a community near you?

## **What the heck are PAW groups?**

Physician Advocating Wellness groups are groups of physicians interested in forging greater connections among their local colleagues through social and educational events. PAW groups can be created in any community if there is enough interest.

## **Why have a community-based physician support group?**

You'll discover that your medical community develops greater collegiality and mutual support, improved resilience, and new friendships. And PAW events are fun!

## **How do PAW groups achieve these results?**

- By offering workshops and lectures on physician health and wellness topics and on non-medical topics of general interest
- By organizing social events for physicians and their families
- By being available to provide guidance to individual physicians and groups in distress
- By directing those in crisis to appropriate resources

## **A few examples of talks and events:**

- How to stay Happy in your Marriage (without really trying!)
- Planning your Retirement: *Not* a financial seminar

- Staying Connected to Each Other in This Crazy Job of Ours
- Balancing your Life
- Update on Substance Abuse
- Apps and Appys

## **Any connection to BC's Physician Health Program (PHP)?**

PAW groups are not currently formally connected to the PHP. However, PAW representatives do refer physicians in crisis to the PHP and to other appropriate agencies.

## **How can I get a PAW group started in my community?**

Please contact any of the members of the PAW Advisory Group through the contact information below.

## **CONTACT:**

Contact any of the following members of the PAW Advisory Group for more information through: [paw4docs@gmail.com](mailto:paw4docs@gmail.com).

**Maple Ridge:** Dr. Laura Kelly

**White Rock:** Dr. Connie Ruffo 604-786-6815;  
Dr. Dorothea Bergen

**Nanaimo:** Dr. Peter Bowen-Roberts

**Victoria:** Dr. Sam Williams

**Kamloops:** Dr. Shirley Sze

**Prince George:** Dr. Michael O'Malley

**Delta/Vancouver:** Dr. Karen Hossack  
604-839-6582

**Vancouver:** Dr. Elizabeth Froese,  
Dr. Nancy Barker

**Provincial Coordinator:** Suzanne Schulhof

September 19, 2011

HAMAC Chairs  
Vice Presidents of Medicine, Health Authorities  
Board of Directors, PHP  
Board of Directors, BCMA

Dear Colleagues,

The Physicians Advocating Wellness (PAW) Advisory Group is a network of community-based physicians who have an interest in enhancing and preserving physician health at the community level.

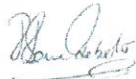
This is an invitation for the Health Authorities to collaborate with the PAW Advisory Group to develop a plan for establishing a connection with local community physicians.

A member of the PAW Advisory Group will endeavour to contact you in the next few weeks to open a dialogue in this regard.

Please find attached a document (Appendix 1) outlining the background of the PAW advisory group, and a fuller explanation of how a collaboration could be beneficial for all concerned.

We are grateful for each Health Authority's consideration and we look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
Members of the Physicians Advocating Wellness Advisory Group



Dr. Peter Bowen-Roberts



Dr. Nancy Barker



Dr. Ken Burns



Dr. Elizabeth Froese



Dr. Karen Hossack



Dr. Laura Kelly



Dr. Michael O'Malley



Dr. Connie Ruffo



Dr. Dorothy L. Williams  
Chair, VIHA HAMAC

encl./ Appendix 1



## **Appendix 1**

### **PHYSICIANS ADVOCATING WELLNESS (PAW)**

#### **Background:**

There are at present several physicians in the province who champion physician health amongst their colleagues within their local communities. These individuals and groups have been contributing their time and effort—in some cases for many years—to connect local physicians with one another, and on many occasions have become the first contact when physicians are in crisis or are concerned about a colleague. Amongst these physicians are representatives from most health authorities, the Addiction medicine community, the Continuing Education group, family physicians, specialists, hospitalists, retired physicians, and physicians with disabilities. The two founding community-based "Physicians Advocating Wellness" (PAW) groups are in Maple Ridge and White Rock, respectively, and are formally supported by the Fraser Health Authority.

There is increasing awareness of the need to promote all aspects of physician health. Attention to physician health benefits not only physicians themselves and their families, but also office and clinic practices, hospitals, health authorities and the wider community. Ensuring a healthy, resilient medical population leads to improved physician retention and assists physicians in developing greater personal and professional effectiveness. The Fraser Health Authority, in providing financial support to the above-mentioned founding PAW groups, has taken the lead in recognizing the value of sustaining local groups of physicians dedicated to enhancing one another's well-being.

The efforts of local groups complement the broad-based activities and profile of the provincial Physician Health Program. The community groups build local collegiality and physicians' mutual awareness, thereby increasing the chance of detecting individual distress, as in substance use disorders and depression. The local groups also assist in identifying community-wide trends such as burn-out and attrition of primary care providers. Through communication between the local groups and the PHP, this local awareness potentially increases PHP access to physicians in crisis. Where community trends are apparent, collaboration between the local groups and their respective Health Authority may effect concerted and creative solutions. Some of the benefits of such community groups are listed at the end of this document.

#### **Proposal:**

We invite all health authorities to follow the lead of the Fraser Health Authority in supporting community-based physician wellness groups. Currently the Fraser Health Authority has given its two existing groups a three-year commitment to provide \$10,000 per year for local projects to promote physician wellness and collegiality; a similar commitment in the remaining health authorities would help to strengthen this trend of physicians supporting one another's wellbeing. In turn, the flourishing of such groups would demonstrate each health authority's commitment to a well-functioning and healthy medical staff and would contribute to the professional satisfaction and retention of physicians.

The long-term goal is for a province-wide network of local support groups all with the same mandate—to connect physicians with their local colleagues in order to improve morale and

mutual support. Input from physician-health focused doctors from all health authorities has reinforced that no single model of local support group fits all communities; each group could be tailored to best address the local and regional needs.

The Board of Directors of the Physician Health Program of BC has expressed in a recent letter from Dr. Becky Temple, the Chair of the Board of Directors, "its appreciation to all members of the PAW group who voluntarily give their time and energy to promote and enhance physician health and wellbeing in their local communities." The letter also acknowledges "the significant contribution of all PAW members." Because of current Physician Health Program funding constraints, the PHP has had to curtail its financial support of these community-based groups; the Program's support is now limited to providing the administrative structure for monthly web-based teleconferences in which community representatives meet by phone to address common concerns and share initiatives and successes. We hope that in future, the PHP will have the resources to complement any support provided by health authorities to sustain, expand, and promote local programs.

We see the proposal of health authority support for local physician wellness groups—as currently in place in the FHA—as a win-win for physicians and health authorities, with large potential benefits for modest costs. Without such support, the local physicians who are currently connecting with and watching out for their colleagues may lose heart and diminish their efforts. Conversely, assurance of such health authority support will, we hope, inspire still more physicians to contribute their own time and effort to enhance their colleagues' well-being, and will help strengthen a network of resilient medical communities.

Below is appended a list of some of the benefits already realized through the existence of established local physician health groups.

**Activities and Benefits of locally-based Physician Support Groups:**

- *Promoting education on physician health;*
- *Promoting collegiality and camaraderie and interpersonal relationships;*
- *Promoting physician retention;*
- *Facilitating management of local critical incidents;*
- *Promoting stress reduction and management;*
- *Facilitating improved management of disruptive behaviours by physicians;*
- *Promoting optimal mental health and management of addictions;*
- *Offering support to physicians and their families, particularly at times of stress or loss;*
- *Offering assistance to physicians and their families with finding replacement / locum coverage for vacations and health issues;*
- *Assisting with rehabilitation and reintegration of physicians after illness;*
- *Promoting excellence in financial and retirement planning;*
- *Supporting local physicians who care for physicians and their families;*
- *Promoting the programs and resources of the Physician Health Program (PHP) of BC;*
- *Directing colleagues to the PHP as needed;*
- *Mentoring for physicians new to the area or community.*