

Wyoming Recovery

Many Health Care Professionals find themselves in debt upon graduation from medical school. Dr. Bert Toews was no exception. He came to Casper, Wyoming in 1979 to complete his residency. Dr. Toews, with the help of a U.S. Small Business Administration loan guaranty, purchased a residential property near the hospital to begin his practice. Bert lived in the basement, and with the help of his future wife, did a lot of the clinic's remodeling themselves. At the onset, Dr. Toews used curtains as dividers to partition off part of the residence for patient examinations. His wife, Carolyn, has an MBA degree, and contributes to the clinic, assisting with the office management and record keeping. .



Dr. Toews decided to expand his practice to include treatment for addiction problems in 1983. Bert had little problem getting national accreditation, but ran into road blocks in the State of Wyoming. He soon found that the State had no rules governing this type of medical practice. It was a long struggle, but in 2001, he finally received state licensing for Wyoming Recovery, LLC.

After a few years of practice, Dr. Toews felt there was a real need for an intervention program for Health Care Professionals. Driven by his own recovery, Dr. Toews became the medical director of the Wyoming Professional Assistance Program (WPAP). The program's goal is to urge licensed medical professionals, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, etc., to seek addiction treatment before they are brought before the Wyoming Medical Board of Medicine for discipline actions, which could result in loss of their license to practice. The program tries to work in the background to persuade abusers to seek help before their problems come to the medical board's attention. Dr. Toews said this is a bigger problem than one might think given the professionals' easy access to drugs and likened it to a kid being in a candy store.

Even with his successes, Dr. Toews explains that many business problems exist. The State provides funding for some of the same services, in essence competing with private practices by contracting out to non-profit organizations. Additionally, many health care insurance providers do not pay for counseling services. Dr. Toews and his wife frequently find themselves working out repayment programs with clients for services rendered.

The practice has grown from a nurse and a receptionist, to 16 full-time and 4 part-time employees. Patient sales have grown from \$70,000 the first year to over \$700,000 in FY02. Carolyn states that collection of accounts receivable is one of their biggest problems. The practice now includes three additional residence properties, located alongside the original clinic. Dr. Toews believes in community

service, freely devoting a portion of his services to the underprivileged on a monthly basis.



Dr. Toews credits SBA for giving him the opportunity to set up his practice, given a limited credit history and financial resources upon graduation from Medical School. SBA's loan policies allow the Agency to give credit for professional diplomas, offsetting the liability of their school loans. SBA's loan guaranty programs play an important role in ensuring access to health care, and can provide the necessary credit for

medical clinic startups, or purchase of existing practices from retiring physicians, in our rural communities.