Focus on these 6 areas to boost physician well-being

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Sara Berg, MS
Senior News Writer
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In an era when physician burnout has become a pressing concern, health systems across the country are stepping up to the plate and implementing innovative strategies to address this critical issue. These transformative efforts are not only focused on mitigating burnout but also promoting overall well-being among physicians and other health professionals.

As a result, some remarkable health systems are now being hailed for their groundbreaking initiatives, which are yielding positive outcomes and redefining the landscape of physician care. Their exceptional work in reducing burnout and enhancing well-being is receiving well-deserved recognition through the AMA Joy in Medicine™ Health System Recognition Program and are serving as beacons of hope for the medical community.

In 2019—the program’s inaugural year—the AMA honored 22 organizations’ commitment to cutting doctor burnout. The program was paused in 2020 as the country first grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. After that pause, the AMA recognized 44 health systems in 2021 that stepped up as COVID-19 strained the nation’s doctors.

Meanwhile, 28 health care organizations representing more than 80,000 physicians were honored in 2022, all earning bronze recognition. These organizations are becoming a network for thought leadership, shared learnings and change agency through AMA convening. This recognition represents the outstanding efforts these organizations have initiated to address the systemic causes of physician burnout.

Reducing physician burnout is a critical component of the AMA Recovery Plan for America’s Physicians.

Far too many American physicians experience burnout. That’s why the AMA develops resources that prioritize well-being and highlight workflow changes so physicians can focus on what matters—patient care.

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Learn about the six focus areas that are part of the AMA Joy in Medicine Health System Recognition Program and how organizations are tackling each of the criteria.

1. **Monitor physician burnout using an assessment tool**
   A key area for health systems and organizations is the demonstration of commitment to monitoring physician burnout using an assessment tool. For example, Baptist Health—a member of the AMA Health System Program—initially completed a COVID well-being assessment in 2020. Then, in June 2022, they completed an AMA Organizational Biopsy® to monitor physician burnout and continue to shift their well-being focus as needed.

   Learn more about the AMA’s organizational well-being assessment (PDF) work or email practice.transformation@ama-assn.org for more information.

2. **Establish a well-being committee or office**
   It is also important to demonstrate organizational investment in establishing a well-being committee or office. This includes the creation of a chief wellness officer position. For Washington Permanente Medical Group—also a member of the AMA Health System Program—this meant creating a medical director of clinical wellness role and establishing a Health & Wellness Advisory Group. This group is four clinicians with training and expertise in clinician well-being who help develop and implement initiatives and programs.

   Health systems can learn more by following these nine steps to lead change as a chief wellness officer.

3. **Commit to measuring time spent on the EHR after work**
   Beyond assessing physician burnout, organizations should also demonstrate a commitment to measuring time spent in the EHR after work hours. At The Permanente Medical Group—an AMA Health System Program member—during the height of the pandemic, patients began to rely on technology to fill in the gaps of in-person care. And they continue to use those electronic formats. To help, nurses and administrative staff have taken on inbox messages that don’t require physician input. Additionally, using technology tools, training and team-based care can help reduce the time spent on clerical...
duties.

4 Promote leadership development
Health care organizations should also demonstrate investment in promoting leadership development. At Ochsner Health—an AMA Health System Program member—this means developing leaders ready to battle burnout through a leadership program. The goal for individual participants is to develop a plan and a commitment to that plan to try and change actions. Ochsner is a gold recipient of the AMA Joy in Medicine Health System Recognition Program.

5 Measure teamwork metrics
Organizations should also be committed to measuring teamwork metrics. While Children’s Primary Care Medical Group in San Diego was a bronze recipient of the AMA Joy in Medicine Health System Recognition Program, they knew more work needed to be done, particularly around redesigning the care team. This meant bringing departments together and making sure everyone is helping with the tasks that have traditionally fallen on the physician. It requires the physician team and management team to work together. Team-based care questions will be embedded in their next AMA survey.

6 Establish peer support programs
It is also important for health organizations to demonstrate an establishment of peer support programs. This can help health systems make an immediate impact. At ChristianaCare, the Care for the Caregiver peer support program has been an incredibly effective support strategy, especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learn more from the AMA about three keys to a successful peer-support program for physicians.

The AMA Physician Well-being Program offers physicians and health systems a choice of cutting-edge tools, information and resources to help rekindle a joy in medicine. By focusing on factors causing burnout at the system level, the AMA assesses an organization’s well-being (PDF) and offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.