

Stopping burnout a top priority for physicians in training

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As burnout and suicide continue to plague the medical profession at much higher rates than the general population, the physician community took action Monday at the 2015 AMA Interim Meeting. New policy is aimed at ensuring physicians in training have access to potentially life-saving mental health services.

A weighty problem

Each year roughly 300-400 U.S. physicians die by suicide, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. A frequently cited suicide rate in male physicians is 40 percent higher than in the general male population and 130 percent higher among female physicians than in the general female population.

Despite high rates of suicidal thoughts and mental health problems among residents, very few actually seek mental health services, according to a recent study in *JAMA Psychiatry*. One of the main reasons residents cited for not seeking help was a concern about confidentiality.

“Medical training can exacerbate risk factors for mental illness, such as sleep deprivation and relocation to a new environment with little support,” AMA Student Board Member Dina Marie Pitta said in a news release. “That is why it is so important that we help increase access to mental health care services for any student or resident physician who is experiencing depression or suicidal thoughts and find ways to continue to reduce the barriers that may stand in the way of getting the care they need.”

Overcoming barriers

To help address concerns about privacy that often keep physicians in training from getting the care they need, the AMA adopted new policy that promotes confidential, accessible and affordable mental

health services for medical students, residents and fellows.

Solutions already underway

The AMA offers several online modules through its STEPS Forward website to help physicians in practice and physicians in training recognize and address burnout, including:

- Preventing resident and fellow burnout
- Preventing physician burnout
- Improving physician resiliency

The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) also is focusing on ways to improve resident well-being including a special working conference this month. Read more in an *AMA Wire*® interview with Timothy Brigham, PhD, senior vice president of the department of education and chief of staff at the ACGME.

Related reading on physician wellness

- Ways residents have found to conquer burnout
- How to beat burnout: 7 signs physicians should know
- How residents are beating burnout with help from the theatre
- How one program achieved resident wellness, work-life balance
- Student SOS: 6 ways to avoid “distress” in medical school