



45% of residents feel undervalued. Here are 3 ways to fix that.



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Often on the front lines in patient care, resident physicians play a vital role in assuring that optimal patient outcomes are achieved. Still, many feel that their health care organizations may not recognize those efforts. Short on time by nature, residents may function better when they feel valued by their organization.

According to exclusive data based on survey responses from more than 1,600 resident physicians across 17 organizations using the AMA Organizational Biopsy[®], 45% reported feeling somewhat or not at all valued by their organization, while 55% said they felt valued to a great or moderate extent.

“To these residents, being valued means having a sense of importance or a sense of worth,” said Mark Greenawald, MD, vice chair of family and community medicine at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

“You’re talking about a group of people who have successfully graduated from medical school and here they are now in residency. In many ways, they’re at the top of their game, academically and in their profession. And half of them essentially say that they are somewhat or not at all feeling valued by the organization. That’s pretty scary to start off with when you think about it from that lens,” said Dr. Greenawald, who also is vice chair for academic affairs, well-being and professional development at Carilion Clinic.

What does it take to create an environment where residents feel appropriately valued? Dr. Greenawald and a current resident offered insight on that question.

Tangible gestures of appreciation

Communicating a resident’s value to an organization is a tricky proposition. In most working environments, salary and benefits are a way to communicate how an organization values an employee. Resident salaries, however, are determined by an institution and correlate with training year rather than specialty. So, in a given training institution, all residents who are in their third year of training typically get the same salary, and all in their sixth year are paid the same as well.



Considering that, communicating resident physicians' value to an organization requires a multifaceted approach. Dr. Greenawald, a GME faculty member with decades of experience working with residents, outlined basic factors such as creating psychological and emotional safety, which requires providing residents with an environment in which they can speak up.

But there are also the more tangible measures of appreciation, said Brittany England, MD, a chief resident in the family medicine residency at the Carilion Clinic.

"Spaces, like the resident lounge, are important," Dr. England said. "We are in the hospital and clinic so much, personalization of those spaces and having them updated matters. When the couches in our lounge were falling apart, when we asked for standing desks—our residency understood that getting those installed was important to our health and wellness."

Another tangible benefit that may make residents feel valued: A fully stocked fridge.

"If you're on call at night in a hospital, it's hard to get food at all, other than a few vending machines," Dr. Greenawald said. "Certainly, it's hard to get any kind of healthy food. So we have made sure to have a fully stocked refrigerator in our resident workroom. It's a really tiny expense and the return on that investment is residents getting a basic need met. That's huge to them."

Informal recognition

When asked how recognition by one's department has improved job satisfaction over the past month, 44% of respondents indicated that it has improved their satisfaction somewhat or a lot.

Dr. Greenawald stressed that informal recognition can be a more powerful tool.

"What really makes an impact is not awards or some big announcement in front of your peers, what residents need is less formal," he said. "It's somebody in senior leadership coming out to see what they do, to visit them on their turf and acknowledge their work is vitally important."

Amplifying resident voices

To feel like a valued member of the team, residents need to be heard. Resident leaders tend to have their finger on the pulse of their peers. They can often communicate those needs through their involvement with resident wellness committees.



“Listening to residents is where it begins,” Dr. England said. “In different seasons residents have different needs and different residents with different personalities have different needs. It starts with speaking with them, understanding what they need to thrive. It’s not going to be any one thing, but if you have an open conversation with your residents and that helps you understand their needs as a group it is very important.”