

How med students avoid burnout

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The number of physicians suffering from burnout has increased in the last few years, but the problem doesn't stop with physicians—medical student burnout is also on the rise. At the 2016 AMA Interim Meeting Friday, an expert spoke with medical students about the state of physician burnout and led them in discussion about what they can do to prevent it during their training.

“The first step is always admitting you have a problem,” said Michael Tutty, PhD, vice president of the AMA's Professional Satisfaction and Practice Sustainability group. A study conducted by the AMA and the RAND Corp. sought to address the problem and get to the heart of the issue by identifying the causes of burnout.

“The report showed that physicians are most satisfied when they're doing what they were trained to do—care for patients,” Dr. Tutty said. Some of the root causes that were found by the study were electronic health records (EHR) and burdensome regulations and requirements that take away time with patients. A more recent time-motion study conducted by the AMA and Dartmouth-Hitchcock found that almost one-half of the physician workday is now spent on EHR data entry and other administrative desk work.

These factors exacerbate the physician burnout issue—a challenge that directly affects everyone in the U.S. because those physicians have less time to focus on their relationship with their patients.

For medical students, the hours spent studying and training to become physicians weighs them down and causes burnout as well. Almost 45 percent of medical students are feeling the effects of burnout, Dr. Tutty said.

So what can medical students do to prevent burnout? Dr. Tutty asked attendees to form smaller groups to talk about what leads to burnout and certain ways they've found to avoid it.

The students recognized that medical school burnout is real and the pressures and workload that lead to it are not going away. The key is to get ahead of the problem or learn to make changes to your life

and school schedule when it becomes overwhelming. Among the students' solutions:

- | Exercise, meditate, eat and sleep. As simple as this sounds, these are critical. Even when cramming for an exam, sometimes it's better for your mind and body to get the sleep you need to perform well in than it is to stay up all night studying.
- | Your peer network can do more than you think. Talk with your fellow students and support them as well. Don't be afraid to say you're exhausted or that you feel like you're experiencing burnout. As Dr. Tutty said, the first step is always admitting you have a problem.
- | Learn about the support systems your school may already have in place. Many medical schools have developed student-wellness programs that focus on making sure medical students are taking care of themselves and are learning how to deal with the stress and pressure of becoming a physician.

More on medical student burnout

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- | Medical school burnout: How to take care of yourself
- | Stopping burnout a top priority for physicians in training
- | Medical residents ward off physician burnout with peer network
- | How physician burnout compares to general working population