

Work-life balance remains residents' biggest challenge: survey

SEP 1, 2017

Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

One in three residents considers work-life balance the biggest challenge they face during their graduate medical education, according to a recently published survey report. This marks the third consecutive year in which survey respondents listed work-life balance as their biggest challenge.

Residents listed their second biggest challenge of residency as dealing with the pressures or demands on their time, according to Medscape's "Residents Lifestyle and Happiness Report 2017." Cited by 17 percent of respondents in 2017, that answer also rated second in 2016. Other noteworthy factors residents listed as their top challenge include fear of failure or making a serious mistake (12 percent), debt (11 percent) and developing the clinical skills required for the specialty (11 percent).

Mental health remains an issue

When asked about depression, 10 percent of respondents said they were depressed always or most of the time, while another 35 percent said they were depressed sometimes. A majority of respondents (51 percent) answered that they were rarely or never depressed.

On the question of suicide, a vast majority of respondents (85 percent) said they had never considered it. Zero percent said they had attempted suicide, while 11 percent of respondents said they had considered it.

This information comes on the heels of an study on the subject of preventable death among residents finding that suicide was the second most common cause of death. The study, published in *Academic Medicine* in July, was conducted using annually reported data between 2000 and 2014 on the status of residents from more than 9,900 programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). During that time, 66 resident suicides took place.

Residents struggling to make time for wellness

In questions that may provide insight into residents' struggles to maintain work-life balance, 36 percent of the Medscape survey respondents said they rarely or never make enough time for personal health and wellness. Female respondents were less likely to make time for personal health and wellness, with 40 percent saying they rarely or never did so, compared with 33 percent of men who responded the same way. In terms of social outlets, when asked if they have enough time for a satisfying social life, 18 percent of responses said they do always or most of the time, while 45 percent respondent that they sometimes have enough time.

In terms of burnout, 66 percent of respondents believe that a manageable work schedule and call hours would be the best way to avoid it. (Higher pay also could help, respondents suggested, with 42 percent citing sufficient compensation to avoid financial stress as a key factor.) It makes sense, then, that respondents identified work schedule as the most important factor they will look for when considering their first job (38 percent).

The 2017 incarnation of the Medscape report included responses from more than 1,500 medical residents in 25 specialties. Data were collected in April and May of 2017.

The AMA's Career Planning Resource provides guidance on a variety of resident-life topics, including tips to ensure physical wellness and understand student loan repayment.

More on this

- Financial plans on track? Residents, see how you compare
- 3 vital steps residents can take toward financial stability
- How to respond when medicine's culture causes moral distress
- To err is human. To speak up? It depends, study says