

Cleveland Clinic's doctor peer coaches build physician resiliency

JAN 28, 2019

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Changes in the health care landscape continue to add to stressors for physicians. Leaders at the Cleveland Clinic see doctor peer coaching as one effective tool to help raise physician resiliency and combat physician burnout.

The Cleveland Clinic coaching network is available to their 4,000 professional staff, which aims to increase job satisfaction, engagement, resilience and professional goal attainment. The peer-coaching program matches physicians and other staffers with a peer coach to confide in. Together they work toward clarifying goals and values and form a path to achieving those goals.

With doctor burnout being a major driver of physician turnover, one of the peer-coaching programs is showing efficacy in an impressive respect. Participation in the program substantially affected the decisions of 25 percent of coaches—and 22 percent of coachees—to stay at the Cleveland Clinic.

“This is a dual benefit not only for the coachees, but coaches too,” said Andrea Sikon, MD, at the International Conference on Physician Health in Toronto. The event was cosponsored by the AMA, Canadian Medical Association and British Medical Association.

Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is currently addressing, issues causing and fueling physician burnout—including time constraints, technology and regulations—to better understand the challenges physicians face.

The AMA Ed Hub™—your center for personalized learning from sources you trust—offers CME on professional well-being that can help you prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine, create a strong team culture and improve physician resiliency.

Meanwhile, the AMA's STEPS Forward™ open-access platform offers innovative strategies that allow physicians and their staff to thrive in the new health care environment.

Launching training sessions

In a decade, the Cleveland Clinic grew from 300 to 3,000 physicians, causing the professional staff to crave relationships. The peer-coaching program allowed the team to facilitate relationships among these physicians.

As an invite-only program, the training includes a four-day intensive—two days of training and a week off for physicians to practice with one another followed by another two days. Each session is 90 minutes and occurs in the evenings with quarterly coaching sessions also available.

The program mirrors communication skills training, said Dr. Sikon, to improve expressions of empathy and listening. Pre- and post-training evaluations help to analyze coaches' performance, while also looking at engagement, satisfaction, resilience and use of skills outside the program.

Helping physicians meet their goals

Annual surveys have shown that 64 percent of coaches and 71 percent of coachees found the peer-coaching experience substantially affected their goals.

The four highest goals for coachees were leadership, work-life balance, relationship building and transition. For coaches, the goals were to enhance their communication and leadership skills.

“We have seen significant use of those skills outside of the direct coaching relationship,” said Dr. Sikon. “They are using it and saying, ‘I am a better leader because of using these skills.’”

“People are using these skills not just with one another,” she said. “They are using them with their patients.”

From all walks of medicine

Core faculty members choose and nominate individuals in different specialties based on existing relationship centered skills and emotional intelligence capacity.

Coaches who complete training can also recommend physicians they think would be good coaches.

Most physicians have 20–40 years in practice, but about 10 percent have been in practice for less than 10 years. A small number of physicians are also retired or nearing retirement.

“You spend your whole life immersed in your professional identity that is tied up in medicine, and then what do you do?” Dr. Sikon said. “This is another way to engage that experience with those individuals and their passion in a different way after retirement.”