

Physician burnout: The pledge your organization should make now

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Physicians are dedicated to serving the best interests of their patients. Yet when physicians are stressed or burned out, it can be difficult to create meaningful connections with patients. While challenges of doctor burnout remain widespread, addressing well-being can benefit patients, physicians and the health care system.

One way for health systems, organizations and individual physicians to tackle the problem is to endorse the Charter on Physician Well-Being and implement its recommendations. The charter was created by the Collaborative for Healing and Renewal in Medicine (CHARM), which is a group of experts on physician burnout from leading medical centers and organizations, including the AMA.

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 and reduce the challenges physicians face. By focusing on factors causing burnout at the system-level, the AMA assesses an organization's well-being and offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.

The AMA Ed Hub™—your center for personalized learning from sources you trust—offers education and CME on a broad range of topics, including professional well-being from the AMA's STEPS Forward™ open-access modules offering innovative strategies that allow physicians and their staff to thrive in the new health care environment. These courses can help you prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine, create a strong team culture and improve practice efficiency.

According to a JAMA Viewpoint article about the Charter on Physician Well-Being, governing bodies, policymakers, medical organizations and individual physicians all share a responsibility to proactively support meaningful engagement, vitality and fulfillment in medicine. The charter lays out a set of guiding principles and key commitments as a framework for groups to address physician well-being

beginning in medical training through an entire career.

“The charter is something that just makes good common sense to health care organizations,” said Jonathan Ripp, MD. He is co-founder and co-director of CHARM, and chief wellness officer at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. “Our belief and intent is that when other organizations look at it, they say, ‘Yeah, this is the kind of thing that we stand for and believe in.’”

The JAMA essay includes a copy of the charter, which breaks out the various obligations in the following manner.

Societal commitments:

- Foster a trustworthy and supportive culture in medicine.
- Advocate for policies that enhance well-being.

Organizational commitments:

- Build supportive systems.
- Develop engaged leadership.
- Optimize highly functioning interprofessional teams.

Interpersonal and individual commitments:

- Anticipate and respond to inherent emotional challenges of physician work.
- Prioritize mental health care.
- Practice and promote self-care.

Endorsing the charter should be “a step towards making some of the changes that we believe are going to be helpful in terms of promoting physician well-being,” said Dr. Ripp, senior associate dean for Well-Being and Resilience at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.

More than just a piece of paper

“It’s meant to not just be a statement. It also includes a number of commitments that can be made at multiple levels—the individual level, the organizational level and even a societal level,” said Dr. Ripp. “Anyone at any of the three levels could say they want to endorse this because they believe in the commitments.”

The expectation is to support—and be stewards—of the tenets articulated in the charter and to apply them, as appropriate, in your organizational efforts and decision-making. There is no financial commitment to the process and once an entity is endorsed, there is no expiration—unless there is a

change in support by the organization.

“When an organization or an institution of a society or an individual endorses it, they’re endorsing a document that includes with it a number of commitments and steps that we believe will ideally have an impact on physician well-being,” he said. “If an organization is at a stage where it’s really thinking about making significant investments and actionable change, then this provides some direction.”

In addition to the AMA, organizations such as the American Board of Internal Medicine, American College of Physicians, American Psychiatric Association and Association of American Medical Colleges have already joined to honor the collective commitment of physicians to patients and to each other.

“There’s a growing momentum around organizational commitments to changes that are going to hopefully decrease burnout and promote well-being,” said Dr. Ripp. “We hope that this serves as a pathway towards that.”