Physician burnout: New AMA effort to close solutions research gap

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Physician burnout is a major driver of professional dissatisfaction, impacting nearly every aspect of clinical care. When physicians are burned out, it can lead to devastating consequences for patients and doctors. Now the AMA has launched a three-year multimillion-dollar Practice Transformation Initiative to address the large gap in research on actionable solutions to mitigate burnout.

The initiative comes as research published earlier this year found that the physician burnout rate dropped below 50% among doctors in the U.S. More than 5,000 physicians responded to a survey conducted by researchers from the AMA, the Mayo Clinic and Stanford University School of Medicine. The study found that 43.9% of U.S. physicians exhibited at least one symptom of burnout in 2017, compared with 54.4% in 2014 and 45.5% in 2011.

“Since 2013, the AMA has been leading the national conversation on physician burnout with innovative research and bold advocacy aimed at removing obstacles and burdens that contribute to symptoms of burnout in 44% of physicians,” said AMA Chair Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, MD, MPH. “While AMA efforts to date have increased awareness of the physician burnout crisis at all levels and driven positive change, there is an immediate need for transformational solutions.”

“Wide-spanning change in the health care delivery system needs to emphasize physician well-being as essential to achieving national health goals,” Dr. Ehrenfeld added. “The Practice Transformation Initiative is positioned to lead the medical community to activate systematic change that will energize physicians in their life’s work of caring for patients.”

To kick off this initiative, the AMA is collaborating with the Physicians Foundation and interested state medical societies. The initiative has received foundational engagement from the Medical Society of New Jersey, North Carolina Medical Society and Washington State Medical Association.
The Practice Transformation Initiative will focus on these four areas.

**Expanding research**

The Practice Transformation Initiative will continue the research that has been sponsored by the AMA, or conducted in collaboration with other entities and thought leaders, over the last five years. This includes tracking national rates, understanding causes and identifying the consequences of physician burnout. A lot of research has been completed on these topics, but continued monitoring of trends and new issues is important.

A second domain of research expands on a new body of “practice science.” This includes evidence-based interventions to enhance the delivery models of care at the practice and system level with the goal of improving patient care by increasing physician satisfaction. Through this new line of research, the Practice Transformation Initiative will shift from looking at the prevalence, causes and impacts of physician burnout to evidence-based solutions.

**Convening experts**

Health system executives and other thought leaders will come together through the initiative for proactive dialogue, consensus on solutions, and collaborative sharing of best practices to improve physician satisfaction. This virtual community will benefit from shared learning about advancements in best practices. These groups will also benefit from successful efforts to reduce administrative burden.

They also will receive research publications and learn about upcoming national and international conferences, as well as themed summits. Through these collaborative environments, the AMA aims to move the needle on reducing physician burnout and restoring joy in medicine.

**Activating change**

Through AMA resources, such as STEPS Forward™, events, workshops and webinars, the Practice Transformation Initiative will help activate change at the organizational level. The AMA will assist institutions in measuring burnout and its drivers by using the Mini-Z survey, and provide practical resources that support transformation to the Quadruple Aim.

STEPS Forward is part of the AMA Ed Hub™, an online platform that brings together all the high-
Recognizing success

The Practice Transformation Initiative will also leverage the AMA’s advocacy expertise and successes to disseminate clarifications on policies and regulations that affect physician satisfaction. Issues include regulatory pain points, coding and payment clarifications, and care coordination requirements.

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.

Learn more about the AMA practice-transformation strategies and resources designed to increase professional satisfaction and physician well-being. For more information on this new initiative, email Practice.Transformation@ama-assn.org.