

Medical society membership: A deterrent to physician burnout

SEP 17, 2019

Sara Berg

Senior News Writer

As strategies for mitigating burnout continue to improve, many doctors have found that professional solidarity can help. A group of experts is citing research showing that joining physician organizations and other national or local groups may serve as a way for medical students, residents and doctors to remain connected to the practice of medicine and their communities. Having a strong support system can help physicians respond to stress and prevent burnout.

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.

Authors of the feature published in the *Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons*, “A sense of belonging and community can mitigate physician burnout,” argued that membership in a professional organization can help combat burnout. Here are some of the benefits they outlined.

Offers a support group

The authors found that groups help to create a sense of place, purpose and belonging, which is good for physicians’ psychologically. Through groups, surgeons and physicians can gain a sense of grounding, instill meaning, and enhance self-esteem and sense of worth.

“One way or another, surgeons have a fundamental need for community and comradery, as these factors have been part of their development over the years,” wrote the authors. “Family, civic or religious organizations, interaction with colleagues in the workplace, involvement in professional societies, or some combination thereof offer the human connection we all need to thrive—to build resilience and grow.”

Organizations that build support into their programming structure can play a significant role in the well-being of their physicians.

Plays an active role in well-being

Medical societies exist to preserve the highest standards of the profession through research, education and advocacy. However, while these societies are important for the services they provide, they do play a larger role in the broader community.

Engagement in these medical societies can help physicians expand their opportunities to advance personally and professionally. These groups can also help inspire the next generation of surgeons and physicians.

Professional societies continue to play a more active role in improving physician well-being. For example, the AMA's STEPS Forward[™] open-access modules offer 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 and improve practice efficiency.

STEPS Forward is part of the AMA Ed Hub[™], an online platform that consolidates all the high-quality CME, maintenance of certification, and educational content you need—in one place—with activities relevant to you, automated credit tracking and reporting for some states and specialty boards.

Creates a sense of belonging

Beyond educational resources, mentoring and networking, group membership can boost psychological well-being and self-esteem. Group membership provides physicians with a sense of belonging and meaning, while also remaining as a source of grounding and support.

For example, groups and sections are a great way to join—and get involved in—the AMA depending on age and interest. These include the AMA Medical Student Section, Women Physician Section and Senior Physicians Section, among others.

These and other AMA groups and sections play an active role in policymaking in the AMA House of Delegates.

Life transitions can also make individuals more susceptible to burnout, such as moving from medical school to residency or into practice can create challenges to well-being. Fortunately, though, group membership has been shown to “buffer individuals from negative consequences of change by providing a strong source of personal identity.” This can also enhance the benefits of belonging.

Joining the AMA or other relevant medical societies is not the ultimate solution to physician burnout. However, it does provide an opportunity to access resources on well-being and burnout, while offering a platform for collaboration with peers and mentors who may have similar experiences.