Magnificent 7: These are the keys to boosting physician well-being

JAN 28, 2020

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Growing pressures in health care have contributed to an imbalance of overwhelming job demands and insufficient work resources for doctors, medical students and residents, which has led to burnout, says a report from the National Academy of Medicine. To make improvements in medicine, health systems must look at which resources are lacking, and which are contributing to physician 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 consensus study report published on the National Academy of Medicine website, Taking Action Against Clinician Burnout: A Systems Approach to Professional Well-Being, call for immediate action from the health care system to combat physician burnout and improve professional well-being.

“Improving the U.S. health care system to achieve the goals of better care, improved population health, and lower costs depends in large part on a workforce that is functioning at its highest level,” says the report.

Work system factors continue to contribute to physician burnout and professional well-being. Here are seven job resources—both tangible and intangible resources within the work environment—that affect physician well-being.

Meaning and purpose in work
When physicians, residents and medical students feel they have purpose in life and work, it gives direction, guides decisions, influences behavior and propels individuals toward goals, says the report. This is the same for finding meaning in the work physicians do. It is important to create alignment between work activities and an individual’s views of what they find to be meaningful. For example, physicians who spend less than 20% of their time on the professional activity they find to be meaningful often have higher rates of burnout.

**Organizational culture**

Healthy work environments are associated with job satisfaction, retention and better patient outcomes. But one independent predictor of burnout is inadequate time for professional development. By the same token, having inadequate time allocated for teaching independently also increased a person’s odds of burnout.

**Alignment of values and expectations**

When physicians and other health professionals feel that their values align with those of the organization, engagement and job satisfaction rise. However, if an organization’s values are not congruent with a physician’s, the dissonance intensifies stress. This can lead to physician burnout.

**Job control, flexibility and autonomy**

According to the report, several studies found physicians reported a low sense of control over their practice environment, little autonomy—defined as the amount of freedom someone has to control and plan their work activities, as well as the input they have in decisions—and lack of involvement in decision making contribute to burnout.

**Rewards**

Personal resources are often expended to meet job demands. When this does not result in reward, work stress occurs, creating burnout. Intrinsic rewards occur when individuals perceive their work as meaningful, have job control, feel mastery over their work, are respected and connected with others while extrinsic include money, prestige and praise. Another important reward is explicit feedback on a job well done from their supervisors, peers and patients.
Professional relationships, support

Having a strong relationship with patients can be a benefit, but so can interpersonal relationships between colleagues. With enhanced and supportive professional relationships, it provides a source of support that buffers against detrimental stress.

Unfortunately, some relationships can be a source of tension that adds to work-related stress and burnout. But when interpersonal relationships are strong, they protect against stress by providing social support.

Work-life integration

This is the combination of personal and professional responsibilities and activities. Compared to other U.S. workers, physicians are less likely to be satisfied with their work-life integration, according to the report. Struggles with work-life integration create work-home conflicts, which can also increase the risk of burnout. These conflicts can be reduced when better alignment is created between work schedules and personal life needs.

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. One CME module specifically addresses establishing workflows and process.

STEPS Forward is part of the AMA Ed Hub, an online platform with high-quality CME and education that supports the professional development needs of physicians and other health professionals. With topics relevant to you, it also offers an easy, streamlined way to find, take, track and report educational activities.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/physician-health/magnificent-7-these-are-keys-boosting-physician-well-being
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