

What is a chief wellness officer?

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With increasing rates of physician burnout, health systems can no longer afford to ignore this major public health issue. Health systems need to prioritize the well-being of physicians and other health professionals by developing an executive-level champion position: chief wellness officer (CWO). Appointing a CWO helps to convey that well-being is of equal importance to that of quality, informatics and data in the sustainability and success of the organization.

To systematically improve well-being among physicians and other health professionals, organizations need more than ad hoc wellness committees and wellness champions. Vanguard organizations are creating this new C-level executive position to develop an organizational strategy and guide system-level and system-wide efforts to improve professional fulfillment. Creating a chief wellness officer position paves the way for organizations to improve not only care team well-being, but also patient experience, health outcomes, retention of key personnel and a strong financial position.

Here are different ways chief wellness officers continue to address physician burnout and improve professional well-being.

1 5 wellness task force tactics designed to prioritize physician health

Early into the evolving response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rush University Medical Center's Chief Wellness Officer Bryant Adibe, MD, commissioned a special Wellness Task Force. This task force was devoted to coordinating Rush's efforts as part of the overarching command center structure. With its collective expertise, the task force created five key mitigation tactics to reinforce well-being throughout the crisis. The interventions were implemented in addition to an existing, comprehensive wellness initiative already in

place at Rush.

2 How to care for health professionals during crisis and beyond

Creating a resilient organization before a crisis happens is key to the success of physicians and other health professionals. First, appoint a chief wellness officer and establish a professional well-being program. As a crisis event unravels, the CWO and well-being program can quickly shift focus to meet the growing needs of physicians and other health professionals. Learn more about a module that provides a 17-step process for activities before, during and after a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 5 resources built to provide emotional support in times of crisis

With a focus on well-being, Henry Ford Health System in Detroit continues to add valuable emotional support resources to support their teams. Lisa MacLean, MD, director of physician wellness at Henry Ford, performs the same duties as a chief wellness officer, focusing on how to continue to help health professionals receive the support and guidance they need during this public health emergency.

4 Expanded C-suite role puts burnout atop academic system's agenda

At the University of Utah Health (UUH), Chief Wellness Officer Robin Marcus, PhD, helped spearhead the creation of the Resiliency Center, which brought the extensive wellness programs already in existence at UUH together for collaboration. The Center also aims to help physicians become more resilient by encouraging innovation, helping focus energy avoiding duplication of effort across organizational well-being initiatives.

5 Looking upstream for answers

Ochsner Health System's first chief wellness officer, Nigel Girgrah, MD, is focusing the organization's efforts on minimizing the source of stressors and giving time back to physicians. After carefully looking at physician satisfaction surveys, he conducted three months of focus groups to begin taking the right steps toward improving organizational well-being. During his visits to different campuses with a variety of groups of physicians, he asked doctors what went into a good day at work, but also tackled what made for a bad day.

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Strain of pandemic pushes wellness programs to evolve

“We certainly did not start our work around well-being in response to COVID-19, but the infrastructure that we built previously with our Center for WorkLife WellBeing became even more crucial as we're facing this pandemic alongside our caregivers,” said AMA member Heather Farley, MD, chief wellness officer at ChristianaCare. “We're not waiting for people to access resources but proactively reaching out to them to supply those basic well-being needs.”

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Mount Sinai keeps physician well-being in focus

“Through informal queries of our faculty and the observed stressors we realized that our well-being focus needed a new approach to address the enormous strain to our workforce,” said Jonathan Ripp, MD, chief wellness officer at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. “We developed a new model based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. From people on the ground we learned that their primary concerns were meeting basic daily needs, personal and family safety, and anxiety about redeployment to new settings where they might not have the skills.”

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 offers resources to help physicians manage their own mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and provides practical strategies for health system leadership to consider in support of their physicians and care teams during COVID-19.

Additionally, the AMA is offering two free surveys to help health care organizations monitor the impact COVID-19 has on their workforce during this pandemic.