Burnout rates among medical students are higher than other those of same-aged peers who are not pursuing careers in medicine. As a medical student at Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, Eli Levitt had a stake in learning more.

His interest in medical student burnout and its contributing factors, resulted in a poster presentation—titled “High Emotional Intelligence is Associated with Lower Medical Student Burnout in the Clinical Year”—that earned Levitt a spot in the AMA Research Challenge.

To advance to the research challenge, Levitt’s poster was selected as the top five poster presentations from the AMA Research Symposium, the largest research event for medical students, residents and international medical graduates, this past December.

To get to five, the research symposium began with 1,000 submissions. Approximately 500 of which were selected for presentation in a virtual Research Symposium poster gallery. Of those, the top scored posters were featured in a poster competition and voted on by participants. The final group of
five posters represents the innovative thinking needed to drive medicine forward. The finalists cover a wide variety of topics, including the effects of electronic cigarettes, ventilator access during the pandemic and emotional intelligence in relation to burnout.

The next step in the process—the inaugural AMA Research Challenge—offers the five finalists the chance to present to a group of experts in medicine. The event will premiere on YouTube Jan. 13 at 7 p.m. CT. In advance of that competition, Levitt offered some insight on his project.

AMA: What drew you to your research topic?

Levitt: When I first heard that burnout was as high as 50% in some medical schools, I did not know exactly what they meant by "burnout." I could tell it was a problem. And I was curious to learn more about what was contributing to the relatively common finding in medical students and what the implications for education and health care might be.

AMA: Poster presentations are typically done in-person. As with so many things this year, this event had to go virtual. What was the experience like doing a virtual poster presentation?

Levitt: Although there were obvious trade-offs of not being present in person, I think the AMA virtual conference offered a unique experience to share research and learn about other research around the country in a very accessible way. There were some challenges, such as making a research video for the first time. I was definitely outside of my comfort zone with the recording, but looking back, I feel that it will be a good skill to have to share research as we move into a new normal which might include more digital conferences.

AMA: How have you managed your workload as a medical student as well as your poster research?

Levitt: Managing the workload of medical school has always been a challenge for me, but I feel that it is important for me to pursue the projects I am interested in. Everyone I work with is very understanding about the academic responsibilities. With open communication and a combination of scheduling short-term and long-term goals, I was able to spread out the work for this project over about 18 months.

AMA: What connection do you see between your research and your career path?
Levitt: I believe research is essential to providing the best possible and safest care for patients. For me, research, teaching and patient care are all important parts of my goals. I am completing a research year in orthopaedic surgery at the University of Alabama at Birmingham which I am confident is already starting to shape the direction for my career path. I am interested in pursuing a residency in orthopaedic surgery where I can get excellent surgical training and have opportunities to work on my research.

AMA: What is next for your research endeavors?

Levitt: I am always interested in working with others with shared values and goals. My next project is focused on real-world outcomes of patients with COVID. I am part of a National COVID Cohort Collaborative (N3C), which is an innovative approach to integrating electronic health record information from many sites around the country. I am very fortunate to have excellent research mentors at my home institution (Florida International University), at my research year institution (University of Alabama at Birmingham) and across the country with N3C. I am very excited about the potential to continue work by embracing new ways to conduct and share research.