

Why medical societies are in a unique position to address burnout

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Prior to the surge of COVID-19, physician burnout saw a decline. But as the pandemic rages on, burnout remains a concern for physicians across all medical specialties. To improve well-being and reduce physician burnout, research often looks to individual and organizational solutions to reduce administrative burden and free time to focus on patient care. But professional medical societies are in a unique position to address physician burnout and enhance well-being, according to a recent study.

Published in the *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, "Professional Societies' Role in Addressing Member Burnout and Promoting Well-being," evaluated 17 major U.S. professional societies whose members regularly work in critical care settings. A representative from each society documented their existing well-being initiatives while interviews were conducted to explore perspectives on the role of professional societies in addressing physician burnout.

"Medical societies are uniquely positioned to create a psychologically safe environment that almost no one else can. They're able to create a place where you can be completely open, honest and not have any retaliation," said AMA member Tina Shah, MD, MPH, who is a co-author of this study. Dr. Shah is a pulmonary and critical care physician and advises companies how to address burnout.

Here are six recommendations professional medical societies can follow to address physician burnout and promote members' well-being.

Acknowledge burnout

It seems that most medical societies have this first stop on the roadmap covered, "which is acknowledge the problem of burnout," said Dr. Shah. "This is pretty foundational because if this isn't done, you can't even get to the other steps."

Discover six big things that must change to beat physician burnout.

Commit to supporting well-being

There are two sides of the spectrum, said Dr. Shah. Some medical societies "were leaning toward one side of the spectrum, which is being at the forefront like the AMA—not only are we supporting it, but we are creating the content.

The other side functions "mostly as the amplifiers," which means "we are going to connect ourselves to an AMA or a National Academy of Medicine [NAM] and maybe not create this stuff ourselves, but use our vehicles to get this information out," she added. "Regardless though, if a society truly wants to support member well-being, the most effective organizations had dedicated staff."

Learn more about the pledge your organization should make now.

Collaborate to promote well-being

"Partnerships are only going to help leverage up the existing resources that are currently in silos," said Dr. Shah. "The more we connect, the better it will be because there are so many times where someone has answered a question, but you don't know where that paper is or you haven't seen that intervention."

Read about a secret weapon to combat physician stress: connecting with colleagues.

Educate and advocate for change

"A professional medical society has that unique ability to create a psychologically safe environment for its members that you can't necessarily get in a health care institution or provider group," said Dr. Shah. "Being able to speak with a much larger voice to advocate for those very things that drive burnout is a unique role for medical societies."

Foster innovation through research

"Many of the organizations we interviewed have research as a cornerstone of their mission," said Dr. Shah. "Why not apply research to this pressing problem in health care and devote not only the talent,

but the funding to actually get studies out there to inform interventions at work?"

Support organizational and individual solutions

"As far as individual interventions go, you have the space to do mindfulness training, other types of resiliency training and you also have the time to train folks to implement organizational interventions," said Dr. Shah. While individual solutions are still valuable, "more bang for your buck comes from organizational intervention and this is where a medical society can push the envelope."

Discover why focusing burnout efforts on individual doctors misses the boat.