

As COVID-19 strains nation's doctors, these health systems step up

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Physician burnout has been an ongoing problem in medicine. But the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated that stress and exhaustion with half of health workers reporting burnout and 38% self-reported experiencing anxiety or depression while another 43% suffered from work overload. Through this turmoil and increased stress, though, many U.S. health systems have risen to the occasion, further elevating the need to combat physician burnout and promote well-being. That work has not gone unnoticed.

Forty-four health care organizations are recipients of the 2021 Joy in Medicine™ Health System Recognition Program—double that of the AMA program's inaugural year. This recognition represents the outstanding efforts these organizations have initiated to address the systemic causes of physician burnout in areas such as assessment, leadership, teamwork, peer support and practice-environment efficiency.

Launched in 2019, the program was paused in 2020 as the country grappled with the pandemic.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has placed extraordinary stress on physicians and other health care professionals,” said AMA President Gerald E. Harmon, MD. “While it is always important for health systems to focus on the well-being of care teams, the imperative is greater than ever as acute stress from combatting the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to higher rates of work overload, anxiety and depression.

The health systems recognized “are true leaders in promoting an organizational response that makes a difference in the lives of the health care workforce,” Dr. Harmon added.

Keeping well-being at the forefront

“The recognition program offers a road map to guide health system leaders who are interested, engaged and committed in efforts to fight the root causes of burnout in the health care workforce,” said AMA Vice President of Professional Satisfaction Christine Sinsky, MD. “The 44 health systems recognized this year by the AMA are creating momentum in the health care community for a united commitment to wide-spanning change in the culture of medicine that emphasizes professional well-being in health care.”

The organizations that received recognition in 2021 are:

- Ascension Medical Group, St. Louis.
- Atrium Health, Charlotte, North Carolina.
- Atrius Health, Newton, Massachusetts.
- Bassett Healthcare Network, Cooperstown, New York.
- Bayhealth, Dover, Delaware.
- BJC Medical Group, St. Louis.
- Boston Medical Center.
- Bozeman Health, in Montana.
- Centra Medical Group, Lynchburg, Virginia.
- Children's Mercy Kansas City, in Missouri.
- Children's Primary Care Medical Group, San Diego.
- ChristianaCare, Newark, Delaware.
- Christus Physician Group, Irving, Texas.
- Confluence Health, Wenatchee, Washington.
- Harvard Medical Faculty at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston.
- Heartland Health Centers, Chicago.
- Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York City.
- Kootenai Health, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.
- LCMC Health, New Orleans.
- Massachusetts General Physicians Organization, Boston.
- Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota.
- MedStar Health, Columbia, Maryland.
- Mercy Medical Group, Chicago.
- Michigan Medicine: University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor.
- MidMichigan Health, Midland, Michigan.
- New Hanover Regional Medical Center, Wilmington, North Carolina.
- Northwestern Medicine, Chicago.
- Oak Street Health, Chicago.
- Ochsner Health System, New Orleans.
- Orlando Health in Florida.
- Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Buffalo, New York.

- Sanford Health, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.
- South Georgia Medical Center, Valdosta.
- Southern California Permanente Medical Group in Pasadena.
- Spectrum Health, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- Spectrum Healthcare Partners, South Portland, Maine.
- Stanford Medicine, in California.
- State University of New York Upstate Medical University, Syracuse.
- Thundermist Health Center, Woonsocket, Rhode Island.
- UCHealth Southern Region, Colorado Springs.
- UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital on the Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, Colorado.
- University of North Carolina Health, Chapel Hill.
- University of Utah Health, Salt Lake City.
- University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

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 (PDF) offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.

Applications for 2022 recognition will open in January. Interested organizations will need to complete a self-assessment and attestation according to program criteria. For more information on the Joy in Medicine Recognition Program (PDF), email practice.transformation@ama-assn.org.