

# 8 doctors leading the charge in fighting physician burnout

DEC 28, 2021

**Sara Berg, MS**

Senior News Writer

---

Physician burnout isn't a new concept, but the awareness of this occupational distress and exhaustion among doctors has been magnified by COVID-19. That rising awareness of physician burnout has contributed to prioritizing system-level well-being initiatives, as well as supporting the health and resiliency of doctors and care team members on the front line.

Whether a physician is a chief wellness officer (CWO), director of well-being or another variation on this role, these doctors are working to combat physician burnout through a variety of means. From improving communication and offering peer support to changing the organizational and team culture, these well-being experts have not let the added stress of the COVID-19 pandemic stand in their way.

Here are eight physicians who are committed to reducing burnout and improving well-being.

## **1** How to ensure physician well-being is top of mind

Health systems must ramp up their support systems, placing well-being as a top priority moving forward. For AMA member Heather Farley, MD, chief wellness officer at ChristianaCare in Wilmington, Delaware, that means being in the trenches with her colleagues to better understand their evolving needs. Learn from Dr. Farley about how health systems can continue to address physician burnout and the ongoing stress of COVID-19.

## **2** She was hired to boost doctors' well-being—then COVID-19 hit

Amy Frieman, MD, started her role as chief wellness officer at Hackensack Meridian Health in Edison, New Jersey, in January 2020. But with years of working on well-being issues under her belt, she shifted focus when COVID-19 hit hard in the spring and never missed a beat. Discover how Dr. Frieman transitioned into her role as CWO at the start of a pandemic and her plans for ensuring physician well-being remains top of mind.

### **3 Unvaccinated, flooded, burned out: How Ochsner Health perseveres**

As the fourth wave of the pandemic hit New Orleans, AMA member Nigel Girgrah, MD, PhD, saw a lot of anger that he hadn't seen previously, even in himself. Dr. Girgrah is a transplant hepatologist and chief wellness officer at Ochsner Health—an AMA Health System Program member. Dr. Girgrah discusses the impact of low vaccination rates, Hurricane Ida and physician burnout, and how Ochsner continues to focus on the well-being of its workforce.

### **4 As pandemic strains doctors, she leads Henry Ford's response**

You're going to have trouble finding satisfaction in your physician career when you have the tendency to seek perfection. Just ask AMA member Lisa MacLean, MD, who often has found herself dwelling on what she could have or should have done better.

Understanding that she was not alone among her colleagues, Dr. MacLean, a psychiatrist at Henry Ford Health System, leaped at the opportunity to become the director of physician wellness at Henry Ford. Dr. MacLean explains her role at Henry Ford and how the pandemic has affected physician well-being.

### **5 Why improving physicians' well-being is an ongoing journey**

For AMA member William Barish, MD, chief wellness officer at Samaritan Health Services in Lebanon, Oregon, his journey to address physician burnout and improve well-being began in 2018. As the impact and duration of the pandemic derailed progress, well-being efforts at Samaritan required revamping. Learn how Dr. Barish transitioned to CWO and how COVID-19 led to a change in Samaritan's focus on well-being as well as his outlook for future efforts to address physician burnout.

### **6 After experiencing burnout, she helps others persevere**

Like most physicians, Patricia Wooden, MD, has a burnout story. When she experienced burnout, Dr. Wooden, a family physician, learned to recover and reset without changing careers. Through that experience, Dr. Wooden determined she didn't want others to go at it alone. Dr. Wooden is now system director for clinician well-being at PeaceHealth Medical Group in Vancouver, Washington. Discover how Dr. Wooden's personal burnout story inspired her and how the pandemic shifted her well-being efforts.

**7**

### **Boosting communication to cut doctors' information overload**

When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, AMA member Heather Schmidt, DO, was transitioning into her role as system medical director of Healthy Work and Well-being at SSM Health. Dr. Schmidt started focusing on physician burnout two years prior but addressing well-being during the pandemic required a shift in those plans. Dr. Schmidt shares how she helped establish employee well-being as a key performance indicator at SSM Health and how she transitioned into her new role during the pandemic.

**8**

### **Meeting doctors at each career stage to promote well-being**

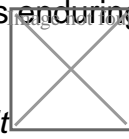
Recognizing that it's OK to not be OK, leaders at Sanford Health System made building a culture of well-being a top priority even prior to the emergence of COVID-19. But when the global pandemic hit, the work they were doing to reduce physician burnout and elevate well-being never faltered. Instead, the pandemic helped accelerate it.

Learn how Luis Garcia, MD, a surgeon and president of Sanford Health System in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is establishing a culture of well-being and the important role of teamwork in the process.

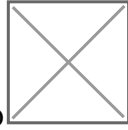
Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is currently addressing issues causing and fueling physician burnout—including time constraints, technology and regulations—to better understand and reduce the challenges physicians face. By focusing on factors causing 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.

AMA STEPS Forward™ open-access toolkits 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.

The CME module, “Chief Wellness Officer Road Map,” is enduring material and designated by the



AMA for a maximum of 0.5?AMA PRA Category 1 Credit.



The module is part of the?AMA Ed?Hub<sup>TM</sup>, an online platform?with top-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.

Learn more about AMA CME accreditation.