

# Dr. Breen's family on what new law bearing her name will do

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It's been almost two years since Lorna Breen, MD, died by suicide. Dr. Breen was recovering from COVID-19 in April 2020 and struggling both mentally and physically, but she chose to work 12-plus hour shifts because she feared she'd lose her medical license or be looked down on by her medical colleagues.

Thanks to a new law passed by Congress, the hope is that fewer health professionals will live with those same fears or suffer their consequences. The Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act was passed by a unanimous voice vote in February.

Dr. Breen's brother-in-law Corey Feist, who is co-founder and president of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation in Charlottesville, Virginia, spoke about the law's passage and the impact it can have on the health care community in a recent episode of "AMA Moving Medicine."

## Four main provisions

The law's first two provisions are grants given to current health professionals, as well as medical students and nursing students, to help educate them on evidence-based strategies to reduce burnout and prevent mental and behavioral health conditions.

Forty-six health systems received grant money in January to coincide with the second anniversary of the detection of the first COVID-19 patient in the U.S., Feist said.

The third component of the law is a national campaign to encourage physicians and other health professionals to seek support and treatment for mental health and behavioral health concerns. Feist spent his career in health care and is the former CEO of the University of Virginia Physicians Group. After his sister-in-law died, he was stunned to learn how pervasive mental and behavioral health challenges were among health professionals.

“What I've learned talking about mental health with health care professionals is that once something like this happens ... it gives others permission to speak about it too,” Feist said. “This national awareness campaign will do just that and try to not only help the health care workforce identify these issues, but also find out how to obtain treatment for mental health conditions, as well as burnout.”

Read about preventing physician suicide and why now is the time to have a difficult talk about physician suicide.

## Three-year study

The final component of the law named after Dr. Breen funds a comprehensive, three-year study to examine mental health and burnout among doctors and other health professionals.

“Prior to the pandemic, we knew burnout was incredibly high and mental health challenges and the stigma of mental health were also high among health care professionals, particularly physicians,” Feist said.

Discover how physicians and health systems can cut the stigma on seeking help and how states can help doctors get the confidential care they deserve.

COVID-19 might have brought more awareness to mental health concerns and burnout within the health care profession, but COVID-19 is not the root cause of that burnout, Feist said.

“Some of these answers are complicated, but some of them are quite simple,” Feist said. “They really start with reaching out to colleagues or looking yourself in the mirror and making a change in the way that you're going to approach your own self-care and that of your colleagues.”

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