Meal prep to kayaking: Supporting resident wellness with Shaza Aouthmany, MD

AMA's Moving Medicine video series amplifies physician voices and highlights developments and achievements throughout medicine.

Featured topic and speakers

In recognition of upcoming Doctors' Day, AMA Chief Experience Officer Todd Unger talks with Shaza Aouthmany, MD, the assistant dean of graduate and continuing medical education at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences, about how her institution supports residents by actively promoting wellness through social outings, nutrition tips and access to mental health services 24/7.

Speaker

Shaza Aouthmany, MD, assistant dean, graduate and continuing medical education, University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences

Transcript

Unger: Hello, this is the American Medical Association's Moving Medicine video and podcast. Doctors' Day is March 30 and in recognition of that day, we're devoting special programming to spotlight efforts to support and celebrate our nation's physicians. And today, we're joined by Dr. Shaza Aouthmany, the assistant dean of graduate and continuing medical education at the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences in Toledo, Ohio. And she's going to share how her institution supports physicians, particularly residents, by actively promoting wellness.

I'm Todd Unger, AMA's chief experience officer in Chicago. Dr. Aouthmany, thanks so much for joining us. As we approach this year's Doctors' Day, it's impossible, really, not to stop and think about everything that our physicians have been through over the last two years. You're an emergency medicine physician. You've been on the front lines. What's the feeling now among your colleagues, and is there a sense of optimism going into the next few months or are you still seeing a lot of burnout

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and exhaustion from what you've been through?

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yeah. Thank you for having me here, Todd. I'm definitely beginning to see a shift, a change in my colleagues' attitude, especially with cases going down, patients not being at risk for being sick. Numbers have gone significantly down ... wait times, transfer, ICU beds are way better than we've seen in the past two years. So people are definitely going out, being able to have dinner, visit each other. So it's a big change and definitely optimistic, going in the next few months.

**Unger:** In your position, you interact with a lot of residents and program directors. And I'm curious, have residents in particular had unique challenges that make it especially important right now to recognize and support them? What are you hearing from them?

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yeah, of course. Our residents are on the ground every day. They care about their patients. They want the best for them. However, this can really weigh very heavily on you and can be stressful, especially if you're not prioritizing self-care and wellness. So program directors really understand this, recognize this and they have come up with different unique ways to show their residents that they support them.

**Unger:** Well, I'm interested in finding out more because your institution does put a huge focus on resident and fellow wellness, and you personally oversee those opportunities. So tell us a little bit about what you do in that role and why it's so important.

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yeah. So one of the biggest things that I do in this role is to make sure residents and fellows know what access they have for wellness. For example, medical and mental health services that we provide, ongoing wellness programming that focus on different dimensions of wellness, like financial, social, physical wellness.

And different individual residents and fellows, even program coordinators, can send us an email, text, call me and really discuss different types of things that they're interested in and different suggestions that they do have. So it's really important to have someone focused on this, especially in the institution, because you want to be able to make sure residents get access to this wellness programming. And you'd be surprised how many are unaware of what people do offer.

**Unger:** You know, I've heard that before and not only a lack of awareness but just, I don't know, perhaps reluctance to take advantage of the resources. Do you find that?

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Oh yeah, all the time. I mean, I think it's because you're working 80 hours, so you don't know what you have. And so it's important that you do have some type of wellness, chief wellness officer or anyone that can really bring that type of resources to you.

**Unger:** So at the end of February, you had a resident and fellow appreciation week. Is this something
that you do every year and what happens during that week?

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yeah, it's actually one of my favorite times during the year. We do it yearly and at the end of February, it's a whole week. The goal is to make sure residents and fellows know that they feel appreciated. There's a Thank a Resident Day. And I always thought to myself, why is it only one day? So I wanted to have a whole week just like other providers get, they get a whole week. So I felt like residents and fellows should get a week as well.

And during this week we set up different types of activities, food trucks, coffee, pastries, snacks. We do giveaways. We have local businesses that actually contribute and donate different things from their own businesses for the residents. And Chick-fil-A is also a big winner for the residents. They donate, the residents and you can never—

**Unger:** A big winner for everyone.

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yes, exactly. I mean, who doesn't want to eat a chicken sandwich at the end of the week? So it's a big win. And we also do give awards to our residents. So we pick three awards for best clinical teaching, professionalism among the house staff, excellence in patient care. And during this time, we put their picture up, we give them an award and we also give them an educational fund. And just these small efforts can make such a big difference to them.

**Unger:** I'm curious, based on your experience and your ongoing wellness program, what efforts have you seen that work really well?

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yeah, so each resident and fellow is different and their needs are different. So when it comes to that, you really want to focus on a whole person approach, mental, emotional, physical, social, nutritional, wellness and to ensure that we're doing that, I have a resident/fellow well-being champions from each program that really represent the residents. And I meet with them quarterly. We collaborate, we talk what works, what doesn't work, what suggestions that they have and what programs aren't doing anything.

And that helps me be able to go to that program and approach them and see how can we start providing wellness activities in your program. And so from the program aspect, they have different things. And from an institutional aspect, I know that counseling, yoga, meditation really works and having a gym 24/7 in your hospital obviously is very beneficial.

**Unger:** I guess so because you mentioned earlier that 80 hour a week number. It must be unimaginably physically and emotionally draining.

**Dr. Aouthmany:** Yes.
Unger: How do you make it easy? You mentioned a 24-hour exercise facility. That would be one way to help. How else do you make it accessible and easy for someone who might be struggling to take advantage of these resources?

Dr. Aouthmany: Yeah. So that's why we have those well-being champions. The residents do tap into them all the time. If somebody's not, they're not feeling well, they know where to go and who to talk to. Also, especially during the week of well-being champions, I actually go to every department, every level of the hospital and I actually hand deliver the sandwiches to them, just because it's actually very hard to go to the cafeteria or to meet me in one area because you're working all the time.

Unger: That's very nice. Do you have any advice for other organizations who are looking to increase their support for physicians and particularly residents?

Dr. Aouthmany: You know, you definitely need to have buy-in from the program directors, from the residents, for everything to kind of fall into place. And you really, especially starting off small before you start doing big events, just to see how it fits and how things work out for your institution, just because everybody's a little bit different and you want to be able to make sure everything fits properly. And then I think having a small wellness committee with different faculty, I mean, it should be no more than three or four people, just to bounce off ideas on what you think will work and what won't work.

Unger: I'm curious and this is an unplanned question, what could the AMA do to better support residents, in your view?

Dr. Aouthmany: You know, I think the AMA actually does a lot and I've actually used that as a resource for my residents. I mean, just even having this podcast and actually reaching out to people nationwide, everyone's going to listen to this and know what we're doing, and I can be able to know what other people are doing and that's really going to help make it grow.

Unger: And I urge residents out there to check out our resident/fellow section if they want to get more involved in the AMA. Dr. Aouthmany, thank you so much for being here and talking about this incredibly important topic. And let me give all those residents out there a huge shout-out in recognition for Doctors' Day this year.

Thanks again for being with us. We'll be back with another Moving Medicine video and podcast soon, and make sure to click subscribe on your AMA YouTube channel, Apple, Spotify or wherever you listen to your podcasts. You can find all our videos and podcasts at ama-assn.org/podcasts. Thanks for joining us. Please take care.

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