On National Doctors’ Day, saying thanks is just the start

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March 30 is National Doctors’ Day, which provides an opportunity to thank the courageous souls on health care’s front line who have been battling to save lives during the COVID-19 pandemic while pushing back against the flood of medical misinformation appearing on social media and elsewhere.

The last year has been brutal as patients infected with the Delta and Omicron COVID-19 variants filled up hospitals while militant campaigns were launched against vaccines, mask-wearing and public health officials who fought to protect their communities. It’s no wonder then that, according to a recent survey, many physicians and other health professionals are contemplating early retirement or severely reducing their work hours.

It appears that Congress is starting to appreciate the profound challenge burnout poses for the nation’s health system, having recently passed the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act. The bill is named after an emergency medicine physician who recovered from COVID-19 but then died by suicide after struggling mentally and physically during the early days of the pandemic.

“The AMA commends Congress for passing the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act,” said AMA president Gerald E. Harmon, MD. “We mourn Dr. Breen and take solace that her death prompted a desperately needed effort to focus on the mental health of physicians.

“These issues have always been present in medicine, and the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed them to the forefront. The AMA is grateful the Breen family advocated for this legislation, and that Congress listened,” added Dr. Harmon, a family physician in South Carolina.

6 great resources to fight doctor burnout

Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is 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.

Below are examples of the manifestation of that work to relieve administrative burdens and revive the joy of practicing medicine by “getting rid of the stupid stuff” that gets in the way of doctors helping their patients.

Know what to do when a peer is experiencing significant stress

Throughout the pandemic, physicians have faced significant stress, especially on the front lines of COVID-19 care. This psychological stress can cause injury to the mind and body that goes beyond burnout. But administering stress first aid can make a difference. An AMA STEPS Forward™ toolkit, “Stress First Aid for Health Care Professionals,” tells how this is done.

Using the power of peer support to positively impact medicine

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a tremendous burden on physicians and other health professionals. It is a burden that is cognitive, physical and emotional. One way to address this ongoing burden is through a peer-support program, which can positively shape the culture of medicine during the pandemic and beyond.

5 steps physicians can take to get rid of “stupid stuff”

Low-value tasks place a heavy burden on doctors’ daily workload, which can lead to burnout. But these administrative burdens can be reduced by “getting rid of stupid stuff.” An AMA STEPS Forward toolkit shows how to do this by providing a list of key steps to get rid of stupid stuff and reduce administrative burdens.
Want to save time in your practice? There’s a playbook for that

Physicians in private practice likely spend way too much time on nonpatient-facing tasks that contribute to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and other signs of professional burnout. The “AMA STEPS Forward™ Saving Time Playbook” (PDF) shows how practices can operate more efficiently, so physicians have more time to take care of patients—and themselves.

5 points to cover when establishing a chief wellness officer

The COVID-19 pandemic brought more attention than ever to physician burnout, but this troubling issue isn’t new—it’s been a problem for decades. For many health care organizations, establishing a chief wellness officer position is a key strategy that places physician well-being front and center. An AMA STEPS Forward webinar explains the key steps on how to establish a chief wellness officer position.

4 habits of gratitude physicians can follow to enhance well-being

Early in his career, family physician Mark Greenawald, MD, learned from a patient with terminal cancer that practicing gratitude can enhance one’s well-being even in the face of terrible illness. In an AMA webinar, Dr. Greenawald discusses how physicians can integrate the habit of gratitude into their daily routine.

Read about why National Doctors’ Day has taken on much greater meaning during the pandemic.