

# Inside one health system's \$2.9 million plan to fight burnout

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Fallout from Hurricane Ida and the COVID-19 pandemic led to high levels of burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder among employees of Ochsner Health. But help is on the way. Armed with \$2.9 million in federal funds, the large Louisiana-based health system plans to breathe new life into its workforce through seven evidence-based wellness programs.

The goal was to think outside the box “and be little less traditional about supporting mental health needs,” said Nigel Girgrah, MD, PhD, a transplant hepatologist and the chief wellness officer at Ochsner Health—an AMA Health System Program member.

Burnout rates among Ochsner's 30,000 employees peaked at 54% during the 2021 SARS-CoV-2 Delta wave and 31% during Omicron last December. “Out of necessity, we had to pivot to crisis support,” placing a renewed emphasis on mental health and resilience strategies, said Dr. Girgrah.

Read about the top stressors physicians are facing in 2022.

## Overcoming obstacles to apply for grant

Ochsner secured these funds through the American Rescue Plan. The notice of funding opportunity came out in July 2021, with a September deadline. “We had weeks to put this together over the peak of Delta and while we dealt with recovering from Ida. So, it was very gratifying that we were awarded the grants,” said Dr. Girgrah.

Learn more about Ochsner's recent assessment survey on burnout and how it addressed vaccination requirements at its facilities.

## Seven approaches to improve resilience

Ochsner will use the funds over three years to support these seven evidence-based or evidence-informed solutions.

**Johnson & Johnson Resilience Training:** Aims to protect mental and physical health of employees and ensure delivery of optimal care to patients.

**Personal Leadership Program (PLP):** Supports senior leaders, physicians, and nonphysician clinicians in personal and professional wellness and growth.

**Penn Resilience Program and PERMA Workshops:** Equips employees with practical skills they can apply each day to navigate adversity and thrive in challenging environments.

**Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) Coaching:** Supports nurses, improving their well-being and resiliency in difficult circumstances.

**Cabana by Even Health:** “Cabanas” allow staff to share their challenges, successes and strategies for addressing concerns with providers across the county.

**Schwartz Rounds:** Offer health professionals a regularly scheduled time to discuss the social and emotional issues they face in caring for patients and families.

**Employee assistance program:** Counsels employees on family or marriage conflicts, job stress, financial worries, dependence on alcohol or drugs, depression, loss of a loved one, parenting concerns, and other issues.

## Homing in on nurses, front-line employees

Ochsner is specifically engaging nurses with these initiatives, said Dr. Girgrah.

“I don’t think you could have a strategy around well-being for physicians that doesn’t start to look at the nursing workforce. Burnout in that area is existential to everything we do as a health system,” he said. IHI’s nursing support program for front-line nurses and nursing leaders will initiate this year.

Through Cabana, people can create avatars of themselves, disguise their voices and take part in group therapy sessions led by a licensed behavioral health specialist.

“We were doing this pre-pandemic, but the grant allows us to move from a beta site to full implementation,” said Dr. Girgrah.

PLP invites advanced and executive leaders to participate in an intensive, four-day retreat. Dr. Girgrah explained that the employees examine their early development, how it shaped the people they are today, and whether some of these traits are holding them back.

“The retreat gives employees an opportunity to rewrite their story going forward and be a better version of themselves,” said Dr. Girgrah. “Because you can’t really lead others until you’re a better leader of yourself.”

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.