

# How to make resident doctors' well-being an institutional imperative

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Doctors have experienced a harrowing pandemic era, but the training disruption that has beset resident physicians—some of whom were medical students when the initial wave of COVID-19 hit—has exerted additional strain during the already trying period of graduate medical education.

During a recent episode of “AMA Moving Medicine,” Shaza Aouthmany, MD, of the University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences, spoke about the new realities of resident well-being and how residency programs have taken some unusual paths to address them.

## Realities on the ground

The stress created by the pandemic was enormous for physicians in training, said Dr. Aouthmany, assistant dean of GME.

“Our residents are on the ground every day,” she said. “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.”

In her role, Dr. Aouthmany creates awareness about what wellness services residents and fellows can access. That includes financial, social and physical wellness. It also means she is frequently on call.

“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,” she said. “And you'd be surprised how many are unaware of what people do offer.”

Discover four ways that residency programs can help medical residents beat burnout.

## Celebrating, collaborating with residents

Toledo holds celebration events such as resident-and-fellow appreciation week, which takes place at the end of February. It includes social events and giveaways with food trucks and products donated from local businesses. The week also features awards for best clinical teaching, professionalism among the house staff and excellence in patient care.

“We put their picture up, we give them an award and we also give them an educational fund,” Dr. Aouthmany said. “And just these small efforts can make such a big difference to them.”

But Toledo makes sure that wellness events aren’t contained to a single week.

“Each resident and fellow is different and their needs are different,” Dr. Aouthmany said. “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 or fellow well-being champion 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.”

Such conversations help Dr. Aouthmany approach residency programs to see how they can start or improve their wellness offerings.

“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,” Dr. Aouthmany said.

“AMA Moving Medicine” highlights innovation and the emerging issues that impact physicians and public health today. You can catch every episode by subscribing to the AMA’s YouTube channel or the audio-only podcast version, which also features educational presentations and in-depth discussions.