

Southern California Permanente Medical Group Recognizes Joy in Medicine and the Value of Transparency

Spotlight: Southern California Permanente Medical Group and The Joy in Medicine™ Health System Recognition Program

Both the language and attitude surrounding burnout within health care have changed drastically over the past nine years, according to Dawn R. Clark, MD, chief wellness officer at Southern California Permanente Medical Group. She states, *"Initially, we didn't talk about burnout... We needed to define it, talk about it, and start doing assessments on it... That took some time."* Now, Southern California Permanente Medical Group, which has 14 hospitals and is headquartered in Pasadena, California, eagerly works to understand the barriers hindering physician well-being and ways to enhance joy in medicine.

Dr. Clark's first initiative as chief wellness officer was to investigate physicians' requests and suggestions for improving well-being. After sifting through 85 pages of ideas, four key themes emerged: practice efficiency, community, professional development, and self-care. From there, an architecture was built to support these four pillars of well-being.

The American Medical Association's (AMA) institutional research, assessments, and Joy in Medicine program further supported Southern California Permanente

Medical Group in building a sustainable well-being infrastructure that could serve as a model for other health systems around the country. AMA resources helped Dr. Clark better advocate for the prioritization of physician well-being across her system and the resources to support that work.

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"We frequently work in silos. [The AMA's Joy in Medicine Health System Recognition Program] keeps us on track and allows us to connect the physician experience throughout the organization."

– DAWN R. CLARK, MD

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One value Southern California Permanente Medical Group has embodied throughout its journey with physician well-being is leadership transparency – the importance of honest communication across the

organization. This can be seen in their approach to well-being assessments and use of data to inform strategic solutions. In the past, data from well-being surveys were only shared internally. Now, practice efficiency teams analyze survey results and share them broadly, including with the board of directors. This reinforces the value of well-being work, and the board of directors gets a more holistic view of staff across the system.

Well-being survey findings are also shared with middle management in a timely manner, and are analyzed across gender, ethnicity, specialty, medical office building, and more. According to Dr. Clark, *"Getting information quickly into peoples' hands allows them to look at it and dive deeper. We always say it's not an indictment of what they're doing. It's data that they should use to ask questions and to seek resolution."* This empowers teams and team leaders to actively work towards solutions together based on data. *"Instead of us dictating to teams exactly what to do to solve problems, we work with teams so they are empowered to seek solutions together at a local level,"* says Dr. Clark.

This transparency in communication extends to other important issues, such as the introduction of new organizational regulations. When new protocols or staff requests are introduced, the Southern California Permanente Medical Group team proactively shares where the new protocols stem from as well as the rationale for implementing changes.

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"We take the time to tell physicians and the medical health care teams why we must abide by new regulations, why it is important and, if possible, we remove something so that there is no net gain. We recognize that there are only so many hours in a day."

– DAWN R. CLARK, MD

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Moving forward, as Southern California Permanente Medical Group continues to address physician well-being, they anticipate enhancing a culture of psychological safety and growing support for physician

well-being in every decision made. Dr. Clark shares, *"We have actions to help improve the 'speak up' culture... But I think it's the ability to be reflective and have a lot of appreciative inquiry around results [that makes the greatest impact]. We want our physicians and our employees to feel safe and to ask for help when they need it."* Senior leaders are actively encouraged to share personal stories of needing emotional well-being support. This kind of modeling from leadership helps to lessen power dynamics and lights the way for others to feel comfortable doing the same. Leaders work closely with the organization's communications team to destigmatize the need for emotional support and encourage staff to reach out when support is needed.

Dr. Clark shares how Southern California Permanente Medical Group follows the Quadruple Aim, a widely recognized framework to improve health care system performance. The most recently added aim is health care team well-being. Dr. Clark notes, *"Embedding the quadruple aim throughout the organizational DNA is absolutely the goal. Over the last many years, we see it more and more. Until the clinical experience is integral to every decision that we make, then we haven't gotten to the point where we need to be."*



DAWN R. CLARK, MD