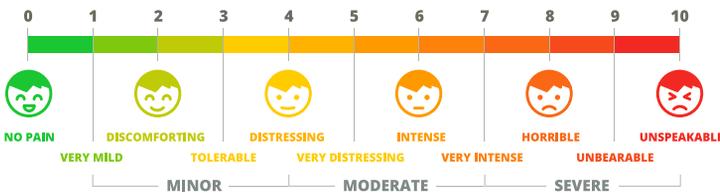


PHYSICIAN WELL-BEING: THE REAL FIFTH VITAL SIGN

In 2001 the Joint Commission declared that pain was being under treated, in part, because it was difficult for patients to convey to their physician exactly how much discomfort they were experiencing. That led to the advent of a new pain scale using a series of face from 0 to 10 – with zero being pain-free and smiling to 10 being intolerable pain and a face of anguish. This helped grow the thought that pain should be considered the fifth vital sign, right alongside heart rate, temperature, blood pressure and respiratory rate.

COMPARATIVE PAIN SCALE



Perhaps the time has now come to introduce another vital sign, one that directly impacts patient care but can't so easily be summed up with a series of caricature facial expressions: Physician Well-Being. Physicians are experiencing professional burnout at increasing rates, a troubling phenomenon because it is clear that to heal others, the health and well-being of the healers is too often overlooked.

"The reason we should care about burnout is because it has the potential for serious consequences on the quality of patient care and safety, patient satisfaction, professionalism, physicians' own care and safety, and the viability of the health care system," Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA) president Evangeline Andarsio, MD, told Ohio Medicine in 2017.

Physician well-being has been an important issue for local, regional and national healthcare organizations for the past several years. Studies have shown that physician behaviors are aligned closely with servant leaders, or those individuals who put the needs of others at a higher priority than their own. Those with innate servant leadership traits select careers and vocations that focus on interests of the greater good and are often called to professions that heal, cure and help others.



This drive and desire to help others can lead to both physical and emotional burnout and is becoming ever present among physicians as the drive to heal is overshadowed by government oversight, long work hours and other external pressures.

And the potential impact of burnout is proving to be extremely dangerous.

A Stanford University School of Medicine study published in July determined that “physician burnout is at least equally responsible for medical errors as unsafe medical workplace conditions, if not more so.”

Tait Shanafelt, MD, associate dean of the school of medicine, according to a press release from the school, said: “If we are trying to maximize the safety and quality of medical care, we must address the factors in the work environment that lead to burnout among our health care providers. . . What we find in this study is that physician burnout levels appear

to be equally, if not more, important than the work unit safety score to the risk of medical errors occurring.”

OSMA as the Collaborative Vehicle

Those sentiments underscore the results of an OSMA survey of physicians conducted last year that concluded nearly 60-percent of respondents felt they needed help in addressing personal burnout issues and nearly 80-percent stated they were certain that a colleague needed help. This call from OSMA members coupled with the passion of Dr. Andarsio, who has made addressing physician burnout a centerpiece of her tenure as president, inspired the creation of the OSMA Physician Well-Being Committee.

The goals of this committee are simple:

1. Use the strengths of the OSMA to bring together the top leaders in physician well-being from across the state.

2. Provide universal, inclusive and non-duplicative programming to both OSMA members and non-members that address the root causes of burnout.

3. Drive change and initiatives to help today’s and tomorrow’s physicians.

The OSMA is in a unique position to bring together physician and research experts from across the state to create actionable initiatives to address physician burnout and concentrate on and enhance physician well-being. Under the tutelage of Dr. Andarsio, dozens of meetings were held across the state with association leaders, health system executives, researchers and study investigators, and peers to work together as the OSMA Physician Well-Being Committee.

This committee welcomed more than 20 physicians and physician well-being experts at its first formalized meeting on Monday, July 30. The three-hour discussion allowed for open and honest dialogue about physician pain points and stress indicators. From the



questions asked on the medical license application to the stigma of “confidential” counseling appointments, members of the committee shared both concerns that lead to burnout and best practices that have been instituted at the local level.

It is clear that the forum provided by the OSMA led to an in-depth dialogue among peers and an even greater willingness to address physician well-being through initial programming and advocacy efforts.

Resources for All Physicians

The first action item from this committee is to audit the hospitals and health systems across the state to benchmark the current physician well-being programs and services offered to the medical staff.

A second action item from the OSMA Physician Well-Being Committee is to create an accessible and inclusive, online resource hub with information for physicians, residents, fellows and medical

students regardless of organization affiliation, medical school or practice setting.

This resources hub will be designed for both the emerging physician as well as the seasoned doctor. Assessment tools, helpful articles, webinars and other resources that address physician well-being across all fronts—individual, institutional, state and national—will be available 24/7. The goal is to launch this hub before the end of 2018.

The final action item that resulted from the inaugural meeting was to include a series of “Physician Well-Being” sessions at the OSMA Educational Symposium on April 5, 2019. As part of these sessions, a moderated town hall session will allow physicians to discuss the issue of burnout void of employer oversight or mandates. Other programming specifics will be finalized in the coming months.

Resources for All Physicians

Finally, the OSMA physician well-being initiative is only as strong as the input and feedback of tomorrow’s physicians. Not only are OSMA medical students involved in the Well-Being Committee, the section is starting to explore and address burnout issues relative to students beyond investing in the right study aids for Step exams.

With the increased focus on physician well-being and its importance, let’s make a case for it becoming the “real” fifth vital sign. The health and wellness of the nation’s healers and caregivers cannot be compromised especially because positive physician well-being is the key to optimal patient care.

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