ADDRESSING AND PREVENTING BURNOUT

Rates at which physicians report the triad of 1) depersonalization 2) emotional exhaustion and 3) low personal accomplishment known collectively as “burnout” are on the rise (see article below). Depersonalization is characterized as treating people as if they were objects, emotional exhaustion refers to losing enthusiasm for work, and low personal accomplishment is having a sense that work is no longer meaningful. Recently we have started to implement interventions that prevent and address burnout, including mindfulness and compassion training opportunities that are detailed in this newsletter.

One evidence-based approach to decrease physician burnout is mindfulness. Training in mindfulness can help physicians maintain concentration during emergencies, lessen rumination, counteract perfectionism, and regain a sense of meaning and connection to their patients. A companion approach that emphasizes compassion training can help develop resiliency to prevent empathy fatigue and to strengthen the ability to be present with suffering.

We are pleased to announce that our mindfulness subcommittee, led by Dr. Lars Osterberg and Dr. Tara Cornaby, is rolling out two sets of classes, one more focused on Mindfulness and one more on Compassion, with space for 80 physicians to participate in 2016. There will be minimal cost to attendees because of funding made possible by Dean Lloyd Minor through the new Center for Physician Wellness and Professional Fulfillment. Also, the subcommittee has created a resource list of related classes, online training, apps, books and CDs.

In addition, six clinics are participating in a pilot "Brief Compassion Intervention for Clinicians" to assess feasibility of periodic brief training in a clinic setting. Drs. Marcia Stefanick and Bob Horowitz, as part of the “Wellness in Medicine Initiative” of the Stanford Prevention Research Center, will lead the intervention.

2016 promises to be a year for our medical staff to experience the benefits of mindfulness and compassion!

Recent Research:


A survey of 35,922 physicians (19.1% return rate) suggests a “10% increase in the prevalence of burnout among US physicians over the last 3 years...When compared with 2011, rates of burnout among physicians were higher in 2014 (54.4% vs 45.5%; p<.001) and satisfaction with work-life balance was lower (40.9% vs 48.5%; p<.001)”. In contrast, minimal differences were observed in burnout rates of the general population and in the proportion of physicians reporting symptoms of depression or suicidal ideation. Mindfulness training is noted as one possible evidence-based solution.