Pre-eminent physician wellness expert visits Stanford

Dr. Tait Shanafelt, Professor of Medicine and Hematology at the Mayo Clinic, is one of the most prominent and widely published international thought leaders in the field of physician wellness. Dr. Shanafelt is an active clinician, researcher and mentor as well as the Founder and Director of Mayo Clinic’s Program on Physician Well-Being. His recent two-day visit was sponsored by our new Center for Wellness and Professional Fulfillment. He was the speaker for two Grand Rounds and made presentations to residency program directors, administrators and clinicians involved in our wellness endeavors.

In his presentations, he emphasized the need for health care organizations to determine from physicians what might improve their professional fulfillment - and then to assist and engage those physicians in improving their own practice environments. He also highlighted the need for promoting flexibility, control, meaning in work, and opportunities for increased physician collegiality/community. Chairs and Division Chiefs explored with him the implications of his recent extraordinary finding that nearly 50% of physician work satisfaction is dependent on the quality of direct local leaders in their departments and divisions.

Two strong themes were evident in these conversations. First of all, the current physician burnout epidemic in Western medicine is not the fault of individual physicians, but rather the result of systems that are simply not sustainable because they require superhuman efforts by physicians. Health care organizations must respond and transform these systems because they are unsustainable. The other main point was that it is critically important to customize improvement efforts for individual care units.

Dr. Shanafelt’s stimulating visit enriched our new center’s strategic plans and illuminated numerous opportunities for collaboration in research and other national initiatives. Our efforts to improve physicians’ lives will continue to benefit significantly from his influence.

Research:


In a large national study of US physicians in all specialties, physicians’ satisfaction with EHR and CPOE was generally low and associated with higher risk for professional burnout.