



**PHYSICIAN WELLNESS AND PROFESSIONAL FULFILLMENT
A STRATEGY FOR PREMINENCE**

*REPORT OF THE PHYSICIAN WELLNESS TASK FORCE
SEPTEMBER 2015*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Physician Wellness Task Force (PWT) was commissioned by Dean Lloyd Minor in February 2015 to evaluate our current status in the area of physician wellness and to recommend whether Stanford Medicine should take additional steps to protect and improve faculty wellness and professional fulfillment.

After a thorough review of the national literature, local data concerning Stanford physician wellness, and our current wellness programs the PWT concludes:

1. There is ample evidence that unprecedented stress on the US healthcare system has resulted in alarming levels of physician burnout nationally. The impact of burnout on the personal lives of physicians and the health systems in which they practice is pervasive. At Stanford, nearly one of three of our MCL and CE faculty has symptoms of burnout, and less than one in four report high professional fulfillment.
2. Physician wellness *can* be improved; several programs have already demonstrated their effectiveness and there are many promising avenues for additional workable interventions.
3. The health and well-being of health care providers is inextricably linked to optimal clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction. Stanford Medicine's goal of preeminence in clinical care as well as research and education would be well served by a deliberate strategy of optimizing the wellness of our faculty.
4. The past five years of increasing activity in this area constitute a pilot program demonstrating the need for and potential value of a more extensive initiative, but even these current limited efforts cannot be sustained without additional resources.
5. Stanford Medicine is poised to become *the* internationally recognized academic leader in this area by providing leadership support, sustained resourcing and an accountability structure that engages the entire organization in improving the wellness and professional fulfillment of our faculty and trainees.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PHYSICIAN WELLNESS TASK FORCE

A. Center for Wellness and Professional Fulfillment

We strongly recommend the establishment of a central organizing structure for wellness activities throughout Stanford Medicine as the foundation for our efforts going forward. The Center's functions would include:

- Promote awareness of wellness resources and initiatives (including the WellMD website)
- Coordinate the myriad of wellness initiatives and promotion of best practices across Stanford Medicine
- Administration, analysis and further development of the physician wellness survey
- Assist with design and implementation of wellness policies and initiatives
- Development, administration and analysis of additional metrics to be used in evaluation of effectiveness of policies and programs
- Support for academic efforts: grant applications, analytics, publications

B. Operational Initiatives

It is the responsibility of our leaders to help create care systems that support professional fulfillment and do not frequently rely on heroic efforts from our care providers. We strongly support the major improvement efforts currently underway in both the Stanford Operating System and the Packard Quality Management System as key contributors to improved physician wellness. We recommend explicit integration of wellness goals into these initiatives in order to maximize gains in that domain and also to encourage physician engagement, which itself is an important contributor to professional fulfillment.

C. Support for Personal Resilience

Physicians should take personal responsibility for improving their own resilience to the inevitable stresses of their roles, and the organization must in turn support those individual efforts. Stanford Medicine should develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to improve the personal health and resilience of physicians, including mental and social health, exercise and nutrition, sleep health, and occupational ergonomic factors. These programs should be made as easily available as possible to our physicians.

D. Research and Scholarship

The Center for Wellness and Professional Fulfillment would be the first of its kind in the nation. Its integrated research and scholarship division would mark a commitment to this field of inquiry that would attract the attention of investigators from across Stanford and the nation. It would also be recognized by granting agencies and philanthropists interested in the role of physician wellness as a key contributor to excellence in clinical care as well as research and education.

E. Governance and Funding

The funding and accountability structure for these activities should reflect the fact that physician wellness is a shared responsibility of the School of Medicine and both health systems (SHC and SCH). The central role of the departments in faculty life suggests that departmental funds should contribute to this effort and that department chairs should have a measure of accountability for the wellness of their faculty. SCH and SHC should also develop accountability for physician wellness within their respective organization structures, including regular reports to their Boards.

F. Phased Implementation

The past five years of increasing activity in this area have initiated multiple pilot programs demonstrating the need for and potential value of a more extensive and cohesive initiative. The first phase is to provide “start-up” funding to establish the Center basic infrastructure, support and sustain current high-value offerings and identify new tools, processes and initiatives to support development of physician wellness across clinical departments and the clinical enterprise. In the first year, the Center will provide the core leadership, which will coordinate across the School of Medicine, SCH and SHC. A major focus will be partnering with departmental leadership and faculty to design specific projects, programs or processes to advance wellness within each department that can be implemented in Years 2 and beyond.

We at Stanford have the opportunity, capability, and compelling vision to create an innovative and comprehensive program that will establish us as the international leader, both academically and operationally, in promoting physician wellness and professional fulfillment as a strategy for excellence in clinical care as well as research and teaching. This report outlines a roadmap to that goal.