

# Bringing Wellness to Your Organization: Highlights from the AAEM Leadership Academy 2021

Robert Lam, MD, FAAEM @Doclam01 | Al'ai Alvarez, MD FAAEM @alvarezzy



**B**urnout remains at critical levels for physicians on the 2021 Medscape Physician Burnout and Suicide Report.<sup>1</sup> With over 12,000 physicians

participating in the survey, 42% of physicians reported that they experienced burnout. Consistent with prior reports, most of the top drivers of burnout were related to the work environment's external factors. This includes bureaucratic tasks, lack of respect from administrators, colleagues, and staff, lack of autonomy, and the burden and complexity of the EHR.

In a series of *Common Sense* articles last year, we introduced Shapiro's *Wellness Hierarchy* as a roadmap for organizations to promote well-being.<sup>2-6</sup> Utilizing Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*, the *Wellness Hierarchy* is a framework for solutions to restoring well-being based on physicians' thwarted needs. We introduced this model at the AAEM 2021 Leadership Academy with crowdsourced solutions solicited from the Academy's leaders. We present ways to optimize each level of the Wellness Hierarchy to consider implementing in your organization.



## Basics

### Physical Health

- Advocate for eating and drinking at your workstation. Utilize the clarified JCAHO and OSHA statements as well as evidence that physicians become dehydrated on shift. Ensure easy access to ice, water, and cups.<sup>7</sup>
- Provide easy access to healthy food, and provide time to eat it.
- Create a system to provide on-shift breaks, ideally allowing for at least 45 minutes to attend to personal needs such as meals, bio-breaks, and even calling family or friends as needed. Outside of physicians, this break time is below the national standards.
- Provide a dedicated lactation room instead of using the supply closet or the bathroom.
- Ensure close by and clean bathrooms.
- Consider limiting nights for our senior colleagues. Create a night float differential to support those who want to work nights.
- Provide ways for new parents to schedule time with their new child. Check out this work by fellow AAEM colleague, Dr. June Gordon.<sup>8</sup>
- Ensure adequate time to rest in between shifts.

### Mental Health

- Participate in National Physician Suicide Awareness Day. AAEM has partnered with every significant EM organization to raise awareness on the silent epidemic of at least 400 physicians dying of suicide each year.

- Provide protected time to meet with mental health counselors. This should be protected from repercussions for asking for help and is especially important for EM resident physicians.
- Make counseling and mental health well-being programs opt-OUT rather than opt-IN.
- Combat loneliness and isolation with platforms for information communication.
- Create a process to provide time to contemplate/cope after a challenging patient encounter.

## Safety

### Job Security

- Due process. If you do not have due process, you cannot focus and advocate for what is best for your patient.<sup>3,10,11</sup>
- Provide paid leave for COVID+ physicians and sick leave in general, not just "move those shifts around."
- Promote democratic, independent practices with an emphasis on autonomy.

### Physical Safety

- Create a campaign for a violence-free ED. We must advocate for No Silence on ED violence.<sup>12,13</sup>
- Provide adequate PPE to protect my family and myself.
- Ensure a safe workplace with security guards who can effectively intervene when needed.
- Create policies with zero tolerance for verbal and physical abuse from ER patients.



**Patient Safety**

- Ensure adequate staffing in the ED, and more importantly, adequate staffing on the floors, to prevent access blocks and back-up/borders in the ED. End the hospital practice of using the ED as an overflow valve for an understaffed, mismanaged hospital system. It's not ED boarding. It's hospital boarding.<sup>14</sup>

**Respect and Autonomy**

**Respect for Emergency Physicians**

- Create a surge plan to minimize hospital boarding. Again, this is not just an ED problem.<sup>14</sup>
- Create metrics to follow and minimize pajama time with the EHR.<sup>15</sup>
- Ensure equity in vaccinations.
- Minimize interruptions.<sup>2</sup>
- Ensure fair compensation for ED physicians concerning the value that we provide to society at-large.
- Ensure metrics on productivity are fair and balanced for quality and excellent patient care.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

- Ensure efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Create a policy to ensure respect and safety from harassment (microaggressions and bias).
- Create transparency and equity in compensation and promotion (gender blind salary).
- Provide training and awareness to address and confront microaggressions from colleagues and patients.

**Appreciation**

**Design a Culture of Gratitude**

- Practice gratitude. You are more likely to see positive things around you.
- Show appreciation for contributing time and talents, especially during this challenging pandemic.
- Promote a daily practice of appreciation/recognition.
- Recognize great care with "Save of the Month" awards.<sup>4</sup>
- Create a "shoutout" board and a gratitude board for staff, including clerks and housekeeping staff.
- Thank your team at the end of your shift.
- Nominate staff for awards.

**Tokens of Gratitude**

- Coffee and donuts! Provide sincere thank you notes to the team, thanking them for their hard work and dedication.
- Cookies, brownies, head coverings, eye pillows filled with rice, hand-written thank you notes written by my kids with crayons and markers, saying thank you.
- Provide colorful trauma shears over the holidays. People love useful swag!
- Midnight buffet to include all staff, including radiology techs.

**Heal Patients and Contribute: Fulfillment/Professional Satisfaction**

**Alignment with Personal Values and Meaning<sup>16</sup>**

- Create programming to enhance connecting with patients (Metrics).
- Doctor-patient relation (back to bedside).
- Relationship-centered care (respecting the role of physicians in the physician-patient interaction).

**Strive for Contentment and Replenishing Your Energy**

- Pursue avocation activities and hobbies.
- Laugh exercises with the team. Laughter yoga!

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to creating a department full of professionally fulfilled emergency physicians, we encourage you to utilize the above examples to pilot with your group. Designing a system that promotes joy and respect at work will optimize physician well-being and work-life integration. Although we know that burnout is a complex problem, even during a pandemic, with all of the challenges we face as the front lines of health care, we have an opportunity to continue to take care of each other. Which of these solutions will you try to bring wellness to your organization? ●



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# AAEM Wellness Resources

AAEM recognizes the burnout that emergency physicians can feel. Our jobs are demanding under normal conditions, and COVID has just increased that demand and feeling of burnout. The AAEM Wellness Committee works on resources and efforts to decrease burnout and increase well-being. Examples of Wellness Committee projects include:

- Wellness activities at the Annual Scientific Assembly
- AAEM Position Statement on Interruptions in the Emergency Department
- Suicide Prevention and Awareness Efforts
- Articles in the AAEM member magazine, *Common Sense*

To access these wellness resources, please visit:

[www.aaem.org/get-involved/committees/committee-groups/wellness](https://www.aaem.org/get-involved/committees/committee-groups/wellness)

