

Western Carolina Medical Society Commitment Statement on Clinician Well-Being

Background

According to the Mayo Clinic, burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance in US physicians worsened from 2011 to 2014 (Mayo Clinic Proc. December 2015; 90(12):1600-1613). More than **half** of US physicians are now experiencing professional burnout, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of patients, and low sense of accomplishment.

Annually, Western Carolina Medical Society (WCMS) conducts open-ended interviews with physicians across the region. For the past 3 years, a growing number of WCMS physicians have cited burnout at the top of their list of professional and personal concerns.

What spurred WCMS into action was a conversation our physician leadership had over a year ago with the widow of a physician who had committed suicide. She cited her inability to find help when she saw her husband's condition deteriorate into desperation: "I looked everywhere for help, online, local and state medical society, and there was nothing! I felt so alone." This statement served as WCMS' relentless charge to provide a safe, neutral, confidential welcoming place for all physicians, physician assistants and their families who need and seek help.

WCMS Healthy Healer Program (HHP). (<https://www.mywcms.org/healthyhealer>)

Vision: The WCMS HHP's vision is to create and sustain a vibrant, healthy and functional medical community where every physician and physician assistant (PA) feels safe, nurtured and supported.

Mission: WCMS' HHP promotes physician and physician assistant family wellness and wellbeing, and assists providers experiencing burnout through advocacy, education, prevention, assistance and referral.

HHP's primary goal is to create a culture in the house of medicine that openly supports providers who seek help for burnout and psychological distress, instead of stigmatizing and punishing them. Using the medical society as a trusted and neutral vehicle, HHP vets and offers easily accessible coaching, counseling, burnout prevention retreats, print/on-line resources, and other local community wellness programs/resources to all physicians/PAs in the region, regardless of institutional affiliation. WCMS HHP has just been awarded a two-year grant from The Physicians Foundation to develop a replicable program for medical societies to address the growing trend of physician burnout.

The HHP focuses on the whole person, both inside and outside of medicine, and includes their personal and professional wellbeing and growth. WCMS believes that the family is key to wellness. Our program advocates humanizing the work environment, provides prevention training, and builds skills for self-awareness so that burnout can be prevented and addressed as it arises.

WCMS is honored to partner with the NAM network of organizations and is committed to collectively reversing the trend of clinician burnout.

About WCMS:

WCMS was established in 1885 by area physicians. Throughout its history, WCMS has been an innovator in supporting and advocating for physicians in the practice of medicine, and working collaboratively with area organizations to address the health challenges facing our community's residents. We serve 16 counties in the westernmost part of North Carolina, most of which is rural.