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Zeroing in on wellness solutions: where to begin?

Department-level strategies to address burnout

Medical Staff Associations across BC are exploring ways to ease long-standing organization and system-level factors that impact physician wellness.

The Vancouver Physician Staff Association (VPSA) representing 1,900+ physician members is using a promising approach that breaks down the challenge in a manageable way. It encourages department-level wellness solutions that are customized and relevant to the unique challenges experienced by each specialty area.

The work draws on Dr. Tait Shanafelt and Dr. Stephen Swensen's organizational strategies to reduce burnout.

The Vancouver group has dedicated Facility Engagement funding to engage its large contingent of members, departments and divisions in this work. These strategies can also be adapted to other sites where the funding is not readily available.



ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS OF PHYSICIAN BURNOUT *

- excessive workloads
- inefficient work processes
- clerical burdens
- work-home conflicts
- lack of input or control with respect to issues affecting work
 - organizational support structures leadership culture

*Dr. Tait Shanafelt, Chief Wellness Officer, Stanford Medicine

Breaking down a manageable strategy: 3 parts



Harness leadership and engagement

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and the Vancouver Physician Staff ssociation (VPSA) joined forces in 2019 in the Vancouver Acute/ Vancouver Community (VA/VC) Physician Wellness Steering Committee to assess the level of burnout among physicians, to find its causes, and to develop collaborative solutions.

Acknowledge and assess the problem VA/VC surveyed their

1,900-plus physician members to understand what drives physician burnout and how that is different in every department. They analyzed the results, and are arranging further meetings with department and division heads to determine next steps.

Target manageable interventions

Department and division heads can review their survey results and access engagement funding to further discover specific burdens/barriers impeding physician wellness in their specialty area. From there, they are identifying wellness champions to develop and lead datadriven interventions specific to their needs.

Harnessing the strategy in the Emergency Department



to respond to use its findings to address burnout rates among members – reported

The Vancouver General Hospital Emergency Department (ED) was quick



departmental survey.



and steering committee co-chairs Dr. Zafrina Poonja and Dr. Ka Wai





Four physicians volunteered as wellness champions: ED physician

Cheung; and department heads Dr. Heather Lindsay and Dr. Chris Lee. An interdisciplinary wellness team that includes the physicians

An ED-level departmental survey assessing physician wellness was conducted, with the nursing team also planning its own

"Our group had the highest response rate to the survey. We knew

burnout was prevalent before the pandemic and that it was only going to get worse with COVID-19. Our burnout rate has skyrocketed over the past 18 months. The department realizes it needs to recover

Dr. Zafrina Poonja: Shifting mindsets

and nursing leadership meets once a month.

from its baseline rate plus the added stresses of the pandemic. We need to act now to ensure recovery." "Our role is to try to understand the best way to advocate for our own physicians in a challenging environment. We need to shift the mindset to realize that when we look after ourselves better, we can better look after our patients. This needs to be done in a holistic way:

as individuals; as a department; and advocating for the rest of the system. We need to identify and voice our concerns." Dr. Ka Wai Cheung: Identifying issues "Every physician is in some way a wellness champion. Every shift, my colleagues and I are identifying issues to look into and finding

appropriate ways to address these. We've all experienced burnout and

know there are things that can be done. Some are easier than others; we've also identified systemic areas that will require more work."

October 2020 1,949

VA/VC WELLNESS SURVEY

Number of physicians surveyed

24% Survey response rate

51% Reported burnout rate

67

Number of VGH Emergency Department physicians

85% Survey response rate

Reported burnout rate

75%

Reported burnout rate

49%

in internal Emergency Department survey taken April 2021

Focused interventions The group identified and started work on Further plans to explore include: multiple improvement initiatives in the • optimizing space within the department that the workplace to support ED physician

 arranging more streamlined outpatient clinics · changing how shifts are scheduled

wellness. Examples include:

Staying on track

organizational and system levels.

• improving the relationship between ED physicians

workload) and identifying champions to lead these

group feels it can address

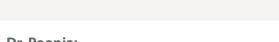
Dr. Poonja: "Some radiology processes were not efficient

applying for funding to address some of the deeper

systemic issues that are drivers of burnout (e.g.,

from our perspective. We organized a meeting with the department and now things are running more smoothly."

The work continues. Some further interventions may be within the control of the department, while others require change at



Dr. Poonja: "We use Dr. Tait Shanafelt and Dr. Stephen Swensen's list of drivers of burnout to assess how we're doing. We're doing well in terms of a sense of community within our group; we have a number of interventions

in place for this. Patient load and administrative work are higher burnout drivers for us. Our survey has provided us with specific examples of this and we're looking to categorize these results to see what we can take on."

"I tell myself how much worse things would be if we hadn't taken these steps."

"Prioritizing physician safety and care would enhance everyone's care. Wellness is definitely a big priority for my department, and I'm encouraged that VCH seems to be stepping up."

colleagues and our patients."

Dr. Cheung: "Burnout has been a systemic problem for healthcare providers for a long time, but the stresses of COVID have been an extra burden. As frontline workers, we're often the first to feel the burden but we don't need to stay silent. There is a lot that can done. We can tackle this head on to the benefit of our

Swenson's Mayo Clinic Strategies to Reduce Burnout >

Vancouver Acute / Vancouver Community wellness strategy Addressing organizational drivers of burnout *



1 Engage leaders, site, health authority to establish leadership, structure, and process

- Leverage engagement structures to bring together a leadership group
- Commit to proactively promoting wellness as an organizational priority
- Agree on an actionable strategy

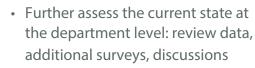
2 Assess burnout and wellness across your local organization and teams

Ask: How are you doing?

- Surveys, meetings: collect data / establish benchmarks for organizational and department-level wellness
- Discover your own local drivers of burnout and needs
- Move on to further localize the strategy, recognizing that workflows, teamwork, experiences and burdens are distinct among different specialities and disciplines

Break down findings by department / division / teams





 Identify and prioritize the local areas of greatest need that impede wellness

Ask: What is unique to us?



Plan focused, manageable interventions within your control

(Emergency Department example)

- Identify physician peer champions
- Engage unit teams and colleagues
- Focus on 2 or 3 high impact opportunities / organizational barriers that are within your control to change and will improve the work environment
- Develop tactics to advance those changes and commit to making them

Ask: what do we have the power to change?

A more streamlined process for... Changing shifts for... Improving relationships with...



5 Measure and build

- Commit to a small group of changes
- Measure progress and communicate
- Build on the momentum to address further changes to improve the work environment
- Engage organizational leaders in broader discussions about systemic challenges that are not within your control to change

Learn more

* This strategy draws on Dr. Stephen Swensen and Dr. Tait Shanafelt's work: Mayo Clinic Strategies to Reduce Burnout: 12 Actions to Create the Ideal Workplace

Borrow an e-book version for up to one week through the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (you

will need your login details).