

# Bridging the Wellness Gap: The Development of a Resident and Faculty Led Wellness Committee

By Audrey Jacobsen, MD, Lori Fiessinger, MD

Discussion of physician wellness and strategies to prevent burnout is now more important than ever given the additional stressors of COVID-19. It is probably not surprising to members of the WDS that studies have shown women physicians are more likely to experience burnout than male physicians. Creating a culture of wellness in medicine has to start with making changes for our trainees. To this end, our academic dermatology department has created a Wellness Committee. The committee is a collaborative effort between residents and faculty. I'll let our resident committee leader tell you more about what we are doing and how we started this important initiative below. We hope our ideas can be adopted broadly in the dermatology community.

*Lori Fiessinger, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota*

Physician wellness is an often talked about topic with a myriad of resources available for those who seek them out. Just a quick search on PubMed for “physician burnout” yields over 600 results. Yet, we still so often find ourselves stressed, having tipped the delicate scales of work-life balance too far. There is a gap between our awareness and our actual practices, both in the professional and personal sphere. To help bridge this gap, we created a Wellness Committee in our Dermatology Department, with the aim not to educate about wellness, but to implement tangible initiatives for faculty and residents.

Before outlining the key components of our wellness initiatives, it's important to acknowledge, that being a member of a wellness committee doesn't mean I am a perfect yoga-practicing, smoothie-drinking, meditation expert. A deterrent to getting others involved in wellness initiatives is the perception that those who are “into wellness” always practice what they preach. I still eat too much candy, make lots of excuses for not working out, and let stress and anxiety get the best of me. In the spirit of reducing stigma, I also believe it's important to disclose that I've seen a mental health professional to help me through some tough times.

The goals of the committee are to:

1. Create a welcoming and supportive environment both in and out of work;
2. Cultivate a culture of positivity within our residency program;
3. Provide resources for residents' physical and mental well-being.

To meet these goals, we created three new initiatives:

1. Resident Peer Mentoring Program
2. Confidential Peer-Support Program
3. Wellness Lecture Series

## **RESIDENT PEER MENTORING PROGRAM**

First, we instituted a resident peer mentoring program. While we may not admit patients to the intensive care unit anymore, the transition from intern year to dermatology isn't easy. There's a new language to learn, the time crunch of busy clinics, surgical and dermatopathology skills to master, and a whole lot of studying to do! We pair incoming dermatology residents with senior residents a couple months before the PGY-2 year starts to be their go-to person for the year.

## **CONFIDENTIAL PEER-SUPPORT PROGRAM**

Second, we realize that life happens and sometimes you need an extra layer of support, so we started a confidential peer-support program. Three resident members of the Wellness Committee are designated as "peer-support" and are available for confidential conversations, provided there is no concern for self-harm. We collaborated with our psychiatry department to outline this initiative and provide a brief training for the peer-support leaders.

## **WELLNESS LECTURE SERIES**

Finally, we introduced a Wellness Lecture Series this year, dedicating time during our normally scheduled academic lectures for important life conversations. We'll be tapping into the vast experiences of our attendings and former graduates to share their tips on work-life balance, having children during residency, time-management, burnout-prevention strategies in addition to more practical topics on things like job interviews, disability insurance, and financial literacy.

One of the most exciting things about our Wellness Committee is that it's resident driven *and* faculty supported. Four co-residents and I braved a Minnesota blizzard in January to meet at a bagel shop early on a Sunday morning to brainstorm our priorities and plans for the committee. It's refreshing to have this kind of influence over your own wellbeing, especially when there is often limited control over your schedule as a resident. We hope these initiatives will help bridge the gap between awareness and practice for both our residents and faculty. If you are interested in creating your own Wellness Committee at your institution or already have one and want to connect, please feel free to contact me at [audreyj@umn.edu](mailto:audreyj@umn.edu) or find me on Instagram [@health.equity.md](https://www.instagram.com/health.equity.md).

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