



BURNOUT IS AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD THAT WE CAN FIX...TOGETHER

Those on the frontlines of America's healthcare system have survived medical school and residency, logged in countless hours caring for patients in dire health, and navigated an ever-evolving healthcare system during extraordinary circumstances in recent years. This high-paced and intense environment has led to an increase in behavioral health issues and burnout among these necessary healthcare heroes.

Burnout is a result of prolonged emotional exhaustion and extreme physical and mental stress. Medical professionals have a long history of under-reporting and under-recognizing burnout, often due to a combination of high-stress situations and higher expectations. The American Medical Association found in a recent study that the overall burnout rate among physicians is over 40 percent. Burnout is also increasing for PAs, nurses, and many other clinicians in the U.S. Ultimately, medical professionals are struggling and unable to find sufficient rejuvenating energy and joy at home and in their workplace.

Many may not realize, but this can also lead to an increase in medical errors. No matter their expertise and dedication to their patients, a stressed provider has a higher chance of making mistakes. These mistakes may increase medical costs and negatively affect the outcomes of the patients they've invested their lives in to protect. Burnout can also decrease productivity and result in early retirement from a profession that can't afford to lose the talent and workforce capacity. In fact, the Association of American Medical Colleges projects

a shortage of 139,000 physicians by 2033. And, according to a May 11 McKinsey report, the United States could see a deficit of 200,000 to 450,000 registered nurses available for direct patient care by 2025. We will likely see this pattern spread across the entire healthcare profession and must work to change the landscape of mental health support and treatment for clinicians immediately.

Compounding this critical issue, the COVID-19 global pandemic has exponentially increased burnout rates among those who care for their communities. Many clinicians were already hesitant to seek mental health support for fear of jeopardizing their medical licenses or diminishing their reputations. Now, due to increasing isolation and moral injury, the day-to-day stress of patient care has been elevated to a level most healthcare workers could never have imagined and were not trained to contend with.

Seeing the need for legislation to address this complex issue, the Medical Society of Virginia (MSV), the Department of Health Professions, and the Board of Medicine, worked closely with former Governor Ralph Northam, Delegate Patrick Hope, and Senator George Barker during the 2020 General Assembly Session to pass the SafeHaven legislation. This legislation protects information, including proceedings, minutes, records, reports, and communications, both written and oral. As of 2021, the SafeHaven™ protections have been extended through additional legislation to now include nurses and pharmacists as well as medical, nursing, PA, and pharmacy students. Protecting both providers and patients, the clinicians participating in the SafeHaven program will only be reportable to the Virginia Board of Medicine if they

are deemed not competent to practice or are a danger to themselves or others.

With these laws in place, the Medical Society of Virginia is able to offer its SafeHaven program, a professional, confidential support system for clinicians seeking help with career fatigue and other mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression, to clinicians across the Commonwealth of Virginia. SafeHaven has quickly become a source of support for those who have spent their career supporting others.

As a result of comprehensive and proactive resources, medical professionals participating in SafeHaven today are identifying solutions, healing injuries, and rediscovering joy and purpose in their career. By confidentially enrolling in SafeHaven, those caring for others can tap into support services that offer flexible hours to accommodate these hard-working professionals. The unique and growing suite of services is specifically designed for and by medical professionals to include 24/7, telephonic support as well as face-to-face counseling sessions with master's- or doctoral-level behavioral health professionals. Best of all, this support system can be leveraged by both healthcare workers and their families.

Peer coaches and clinicians from a variety of specialties, who share a passion for aiding their colleagues with work/life integration, are also available to discuss communication resolution, healthy habits, leadership development, and much more. Peer coaching also provides a meaningful opportunity to give back.

Creative and leadership outlets are available. Volunteering, leadership, social and innovation related opportunities at MSV and the MSV Foundation are key ways to reconnect with the joys of medicine and peers. As a SafeHaven member, clinicians

can actively explore new avenues and innovation through advisory roles with start-ups, channels to develop ideas created in practice, partner with clinicians abroad, teach, speak and write.

Legal and financial services and a virtual assistant is another unique offering for SafeHaven participants. SafeHaven™ members will gain access to hospitality professionals, travel agents, and event coordinators to manage every day and special occasion tasks such as meal delivery, home and auto services, child/elder care services, appointment scheduling, relocation services, and travel arrangements – to name a few. Members will also gain access to telephonic legal and financial consultations and resources.

SafeHaven has quickly become a source of support for those who have spent their career supporting others.”

The growth of protections, programs, and well-being resources like SafeHaven sends a clear message: Burnout is no longer something that medical professionals have to buck up and accept or need to suffer through alone. Together, our community can care for and empower those who have dedicated their lives to keeping

our communities happy and healthy. At SafeHaven, we are honored to provide a confidential space to our clinicians. Here, colleagues and trained professionals stand ready and available for immediate help with the toughest of issues, as well as with the day-to-day struggles involved with balancing patient care and family life. Just as medical professionals have pledged to protect us, we are all committed to locking arms with those on the frontlines to create a circle of support that benefits everyone.



Melina Davis
*The Medical Society of Virginia
CEO and EVP*