

PHYSICIAN WELLNESS

Prevent Physician Burnout and Suicide


Studies indicate physicians commit suicide at a **rate of 1 to 1.5 times higher for male physicians and 2 to 4 times higher for female physicians** in comparison to the general population.¹

The Problem: Legal Barriers Prevent Physicians from Seeking Wellness Support and Counseling

Currently, if a physician has disclosed personal mental health concerns their employer is legally required to report the physician to the Board of Medicine. In a study evaluating physicians-in-training, the most frequently cited barriers to seeking treatment were time (91.5%), preference to manage problems on their own (75.1%), lack of convenient access (61.8%), and concerns about confidentiality (57.3%).²

Early Intervention can Prevent Burnout and Medical Errors

- Experts strongly suggest interventions should focus on both supporting individual physicians via skill building (i.e. stress management and resiliency building) and supporting organizational change.
- Supporting physician interventions enhances their patients' experience of care and reduces costs from decreased physician productivity, high turnover rates, and the adverse consequences of medical errors.³

 *Nearly one
physician a day takes
their own life.*

The Solution: A Physician Wellness Program that Supports Peer to Peer Wellness

The MSV Wellness Program will provide confidential support services where physicians can receive 24/7 counseling from peers and behavioral health professionals.

The program is modeled after Lawyers Helping Lawyers. MSV worked with the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association to ensure the bill does not jeopardize the state's existing disciplinary process, but rather allows physicians to receive the support they need, when they need it.

¹ Eckleberry-Hunt, J., & Lick, D. (2015). Physician depression and suicide: a shared responsibility. *Teaching and learning in medicine*, 27(3), 341-345.

² Utilization and Barriers to Mental Health Services Among Depressed Medical Interns: A Prospective Multisite Study
Constance Guille, Heather Speller, Rachel Laff, C. Neill Epperson, Srijan Sen *J Grad Med Educ*. 2010 Jun; 2(2): 210-214.

³ Brower K.J. (2017) Organization-Level Interventions to Promote Physician Health and Well-Being: From Taking Care of Physicians to Giving Care to Patients. In: Brower K., Riba M. (eds) *Physician Mental Health and Well-Being. Integrating Psychiatry and Primary Care*. Springer, Cham



Q: How will the new Wellness Program help physicians?

The program will use licensed counselors and trained mental health professionals to confidentially help physicians address their wellness and mental health issues.

Q: How will this bill ensure the public is protected?

The bill states no person can participate in the program if there is a reasonable probability that they are not competent to practice, are a danger to themselves, or a danger to their patients or the public.

Q: How is this different than the Virginia Health Practitioners' Monitoring Program (VA HPMP)?

The VA HPMP is a state-run program that is used when a health care provider's condition is impairing their ability to practice. The HPMP is designed to facilitate and support the recovery process.

MSV's new Wellness Program will be an earlier intervention designed to proactively aid physicians who are facing developing or emerging wellness issues.