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Well-Being at VTCSOM: An Avenue for Positive Change

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Most of us have probably heard the term “well-being” in a professional context, but what exactly does it mean to “be well” and how does it relate to the crisis of burnout in healthcare? To answer this question, we have to look at a few additional factors, such as:

- What brings you satisfaction and joy, both personally and professionally?
- Where do you go for support, for both celebration and in response to distress?
- How do you keep stress from impacting your physical, mental, and emotional health?
- How do the systems around you affect your ability to remain aligned with your purpose?

I suspect there are many different answers, which highlights that each individual determines what they need to “be well.” As stated by the CDC, Well-Being is an overall feeling of positivity and fulfillment with life in addition to an absence (or the ability) to deal with negative stressors and conditions.¹ When workplace stressors increase and outweigh the positive aspects, an individual is likely to experience burnout. Burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion created when an individual is persistently overworked or does not feel in control of their daily functions, resulting in a sense of helplessness, depersonalization, reduction of energy levels and immunity, as well as depression and anxiety.²

It is estimated that over half of the US health workforce has experienced symptoms of burnout, with medical students and residents reporting around 60%.³ The ever-increasing systemic demands of clinical workloads create unrealistic expectations that impact a

healthcare worker's ability to provide quality care or may influence them to leave the profession entirely.⁴ Stigmas around seeking mental health services are persistent in the medical profession, leading to increased rates of substance abuse and potential suicides.⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbated this crisis, with unprecedented staffing shortages and unknowable variables constantly shifting the medical landscape.³ However, one thing that is clear from the literature, is that Well-Being can and should be a collective effort between individuals and organizations.⁶

There have been prior efforts to address this issue, but I would like to highlight the work of the **VTCSOM Well-Being Task Force**. This group was established with representation from across the academic health center to create well-being strategies that enhance the vitality of our faculty, staff, residents, and students. Utilizing the seven *Priority Areas* listed in the [National Academy of Medicine's 2022 National Plan for Workforce Well-Being](#) as guidance, the task force's recommendations include the creation of new programs, reframing current procedures, and a commitment to decreasing stress. Proposed solutions were designed to be measurable and sustainable in hopes of creating long-lasting impacts on our culture.

The VTCSOM Well-Being Task Force concluded on March 1, 2023, but the real work is just beginning! With the initial framework created and groundwork underway, more information about their recommendations will be shared in the coming months. We encourage you to participate by sharing feedback as their recommendations become a reality. After all, well-being work takes the collective community to implement effectively!

References

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