

Dec. 1, 2016

3 leading health organizations aim to reduce suicides by physicians, medical trainees

CHICAGO — As increasing rates of stress, depression and fatigue fuel concern about physician well-being, the [Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education \(ACGME\)](#), the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#) and [Mayo Clinic](#) today launched an initiative to prevent physician and medical trainee suicides.

“We want to be part of a national dialogue that addresses physician well-being and leads to transformational change — to a more humane learning environment for all medical education and a healthier culture for all physicians,” says [Thomas J. Nasca, M.D., MACP](#), chief executive officer of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.

At the ACGME’s Second Symposium on Physician Well-Being, the three organizations introduced a library of educational resources on the [ACGME website](#). The research into physician well-being has been growing over recent years, and there have been many efforts at medical schools and residency programs. The resources, intended to help physicians and medical trainees, include:

- A four-minute video that advises medical students, residents and fellows on how to support each other, express concern to peers, and encourage help-seeking behavior
- A comprehensive guide to help graduate training programs respond to a resident death by suicide
- Additional information and access to support

“Taking care of your mental health is the strong and smart thing to do,” says [Christine Moutier, M.D.](#), chief medical officer, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. “Consider it a best practice for physicians and medical trainees. Addressing our own risk in the physician community is an important step toward addressing suicide at the public health level. If physicians begin modeling proactive mental health behaviors, it will send a strong message to all of society.”

A primary risk factor for suicide is unaddressed mental health conditions, including depression, bipolar disorder, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders. Suicide risk is mitigated when mental illness is addressed and managed well, Moutier says.

Physician well-being has a direct impact on patient care. Extensive evidence indicates that burnout and depressive symptoms undermine quality of care

and may contribute to medical errors. Physicians with burnout are also more likely to leave medicine and reduce their clinical hours — both of which impact patient access to care.

“Physician well-being is crucial to the health of our entire system of medical care,” says [Fredric Meyer, M.D.](#), executive dean of education, Mayo Clinic. “For the welfare of patients and the next generation of physicians, the nation’s providers of medical education must strive to cultivate an environment that promotes both stress management and resilience.”

Meyer oversees [Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science](#), whose enrollment includes 200 medical students and nearly 2,400 residents and fellows on three campuses in Arizona, Florida and Minnesota.

At [Mayo Clinic School of Medicine](#), a transformative education model includes specialized training on physician wellness and resiliency to prevent burnout and prepare future physicians for the rigors of clinical practice. Wellness training now has extended into [Mayo Clinic School of Graduate Medical Education](#). And Mayo Clinic Department of Medicine created the [Program on Physician Well-Being](#) in 2007 to evaluate personal, professional and organizational factors that contribute to burnout and foster physician well-being, satisfaction and productivity.

About 87,000 medical students are enrolled in U.S. medical schools, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges. Approximately 125,000 graduates from medical school currently are training in about 150 specialties and subspecialties as residents and fellows in ACGME-accredited programs at about 800 sponsoring institutions, including universities, medical schools and hospitals.

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About the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education

The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education is a private, nonprofit, professional organization responsible for the accreditation of residency and fellowship programs and institutions that sponsor these programs in the U.S. Residency and fellowship programs educate resident and fellow physicians in specialties and subspecialties. The ACGME’s mission is to improve health care and population health by assessing and advancing the quality of resident physicians’ education through accreditation.

About the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention creates a culture that’s smart about mental health through education and community programs, develops suicide prevention through research and advocacy, and provides support for those affected by suicide. Led by CEO Robert Gebbia and headquartered in New York City with a public policy office in Washington, D.C., AFSP has local chapters in all 50 states with programs and events nationwide. Join the conversation on suicide prevention by following AFSP on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

About Mayo Clinic

Mayo Clinic is a nonprofit organization committed to clinical practice, education and research, providing expert, whole-person care to everyone who needs healing. For more information, visit mayoclinic.org/about-mayo-clinic or newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org.

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