Creating a Culture of Well-Being for Healthcare Workers
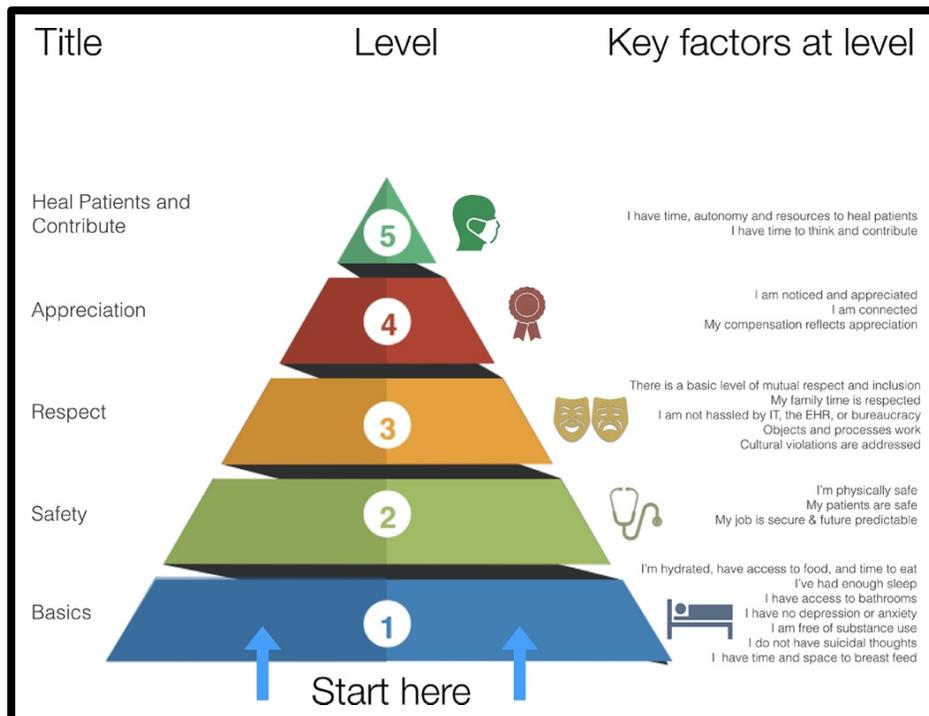
Committee of Origin: Committee on Physician Well-Being
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Healthcare worker (HCW) burnout and mental health issues are a public health crisis.[1] Surveys have found an association between symptoms of burnout and physician perceptions of increased medical error, as well as increased physician intent to reduce clinical hours or leave clinical practice.[2,3] A high turnover rate can cost a healthcare system $500,000 to $1 million to replace a physician.[4] Some experts believe that up to 80% of HCW burnout is related to healthcare system operations and the culture of the organization.[5]

The Committee on Physician Well-being Working Group on Systems & Policy Issues Impacting Well-being recommends an expert opinion and evidence-based system that meets the Physician Wellness Hierarchy of Needs derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Need as described below.[6]

1. Basics: Physical and mental health needs
2. Safety: Patient and HCW safety
3. Respect: Professional behavior among all HCW
4. Appreciation: Recognition for practicing good patient care
5. Heal Patients and Contribute: Self-actualization, purpose-driven life

A team-based organizational platform as opposed to a top-down structure has shown to be effective in establishing a just culture of support.[7] The basis of a team-based approach is an ongoing two-way channel of communication between healthcare providers and hospital leadership. Senior leadership must know and understand the needs and concerns of the HCW. Staff should have no fear of reprisal when the HCW reports a medical error, unprofessional behavior, or concern for the mental or physical health issue of a colleague. Informed executive leadership should implement decisions based on transparent findings from inquiries. This system requires a partnership between clinical staff and leaders that holds each group accountable for implementing a just culture of support. Senior leadership must transparently communicate decisions to their HCW after appropriate consultations with a diverse multidisciplinary committee formed to address these concerns. This inclusive group should be comprised of nurses, physicians, hospital administrators, and other key stakeholders including those from legal and human resources. They will make decisions based on the input from HCW, hospital administration, and public health officials, using relevant tools and workforce surveys. They will report to senior hospital leadership for approval of their decisions.

Title | Level | Key factors at level

5 — Heal Patients and Contribute
I have time, autonomy and resources to heal patients
I have time to think and contribute

4 — Appreciation
I am noticed and appreciated
I am connected
My compensation reflects appreciation

3 — Respect
There is a basic level of mutual respect and inclusion
My family time is respected
I am not hassled by IT, the EHR, or bureaucracy
Objects and processes work
Cultural violations are addressed

2 — Safety
I'm physically safe
My patients are safe
My job is secure & future predictable

1 — Basics
I'm hydrated, have access to food, and time to eat
I've had enough sleep
I have access to bathrooms
I have no depression or anxiety
I am free of substance use
I do not have suicidal thoughts
I have time and space to breast feed

Start here

From: Shapiro DE, Duquette C, Abbott LM et al. Beyond Burnout: A Physician Wellness Hierarchy Designed to Prioritize Interventions at the Systems Level. Am J Med. 2019; (132):556–563

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