

## **The Program Coordinator's Role: Helping to create 'Live Well and Lead Well' Initiative in Neurology**

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The *AANnews* issue from November 2017 highlighted “Workload, Threats to Professionalism Top Causes of Burnout Among Neurologists”. Emotional Exhaustion, Poor Attitude, Career Dissatisfaction are a few signs of Physician Burnout. Burnout can be harmful in-patient care as well as professional and personal well-being. Early retirement, medical malpractice suits, depression, suicide, alcohol use and relationship issues are potential outcomes for individuals that undergo burnout.

As Neurology Coordinators are integral in program development, how can we advocate [the AAN Live Well and Lead Well concept](#) on a day to day basis? We may start to offer the Live Well and Lead Well Initiative within our programs by:

- identifying key stakeholders,
- creating a plan,
- executing the team's goals and objectives

### **Who are your stakeholders?**

Programs may identify a need for trainee's work-life balance. Poor supervisor evaluation, medical team complaints, one-on-one discussions, etc. may trigger red flags for individuals. In order to address the wellness concerns, programs need champions within the organization that understand the complexity and open to dialogue with positive intent. Chief residents, department leadership teams, program directors and program coordinators can all play a role within development, destigmatizing depression, connecting individuals with counseling options during training, and promoting a supportive culture.

### **How to create a plan?**

The AMA has identified five steps to create and sustain a culture of wellness to promote trainee work-life balance.

**Step 1: Create a framework** - Developing a culture of wellness begins with a group of dedicated faculty, residents and staff. This group will advocate for wellness and develop a framework by defining wellness for the program, creating measurable goals, evaluating available resources and establishing outcomes.

**Step 2: Develop a program** - The ACGME has outlined minimal expectations of programs in adding well-being to the curriculum. This creates an opportunity for each program to consider its specific obstacles

in fostering resident wellness. The wellness program should contain elements that meet the needs of the training program and individual trainees through education and engagement. As the program evolves, it is important to continue to survey trainees and assess outcomes. Research should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of programming.

**Step 3: Foster at the individual level** - As individuals, we have six elements of well-being: nutrition, fitness, emotional health, preventive care, financial health, mindset and behavior adaptability. (1) The program should incorporate activities, education and discussion considering these elements to promote personal well-being. In the next section, “How do you execute the goals and objectives”, Program Coordinators responded to LISTSERV and provided several activities currently in practice by training programs.

**Step 4: Empower faculty and trainees to confront burnout** - Empowerment is essential to success and begins with knowledge. It is important to make trainees and medical staff aware of signs of burnout and how to help. Burnout, wellness and mental health should be a topic that is discussed openly and often in an effort to remove stigma and create a culture of support and mentorship within the medical community. For example, an extracurricular series of wellness events that included a physician panel to talk about their personal experiences dealing with burnout in residency and ways they overcame their burnout, a panel of psychologists who discussed ways to overcome test anxiety, massage chairs, therapy dogs, yoga sessions led by students, etc.

Physicians may join and be active in [BrainPAC](#), the [AAN Grassroots Alliance](#), attend [Neurology on the Hill](#), the [Palatucci Advocacy Leadership Forum](#), and participating in [state neurological societies](#). (2)

**Step 5: Create a sustainable culture of wellness and resiliency** - Orienting new trainees and maintaining consistency each academic year in meeting wellness goals will create sustainability, promote resiliency and offer shared success. Meetings with faculty may occur to discuss ways to potentially incorporate wellness into the residency and fellowship curriculum. For example, mandatory wellness events during department orientation may be discussed and talk about their own experiences with burnout as interns. This not only provides opening the conversation about real work-related issues, but gave them an opportunity to hear ways to prevent burnout during their intern year.

### **How do you execute the goals and objectives?**

Residents have expressed a strong desire to connect with their attendings in a manner that extends beyond the bedside. Team building exercises and social gatherings foster a sense of camaraderie among

all team members – residents and attendings – and these events can help to reduce the effects of resident fatigue and burnout.

In addition to holiday parties, annual picnics and resident retreats, programs are sponsoring “switch dinners” hosted by the attending on-service, quarterly dinners hosted by program directors, and a monthly “Happy Hour” at local establishments.

Some programs have nominated “Social Chiefs” who organize on-site team building events such as “Wellness Wednesday” lunch-hour yoga, and noon lectures given by a meditation coach.

Peer driven events held in the evening or weekend hours include bowling, paint ball, escape rooms, obstacle courses, flag football and soccer. Even a small amount of physical activity will help to improve sleep and reduce stress.

How about individuals who feel uncomfortable participating in team activities? Individuals with severe stress or burnout may require individualized consultation from an expert. In these cases, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may be a good place to start. EAPs are an accessible and confidential way to take the first steps toward resolving almost any kind of personal challenge or conflict. Generally, the problems that people bring to EAP fall into such broad categories as:

- Family concerns
- Legal matters
- Financial difficulties
- Job stress
- Grief
- Depression
- Interpersonal conflicts at work or at home
- Addiction to alcohol or drugs
- Self-esteem

**What we will expect to gain?**

Work-life balance, camaraderie and empathetic physicians are several potential outcomes from a wellness program. By working together, the medical education community will train physicians who are mentally healthy and excited for their future careers. Neurologists living well and leading well are more likely to continue practicing within the specialty. This kind of learning environment will foster a happy, resilient physician workforce and addresses the health care needs of our country.

References:

- (1) [https://www.stepsforward.org/Static/images/modules/23/downloadable/resident\\_wellness.pdf](https://www.stepsforward.org/Static/images/modules/23/downloadable/resident_wellness.pdf)
- (2) Evans R, Upchurch C. A Survey of Neurologists on Career Satisfaction and Burnout. Practice Neurology. Sep/Oct 2013 Issue.

*\* Please note the views expressed here are strictly of the authors viewpoint and does not necessarily reflect the stance of the American Academy of Neurology.*