



GME Wellness Sub-Committee Newsbyte

Balance: Work-life or Life-work?

For me, wellness is about balance. Work-life balance or life-work balance, it doesn't matter what you label it, it is important. This means making sure you prioritize time for whatever is important for you. I think this advice is both extremely personal, but easily generalizable. I've never been a huge fan of urging people to perform specific "burnout fighting" activities like meditation or yoga, which is advice you find described in the literature regarding physician wellness and developing resilience. I think you should just do what makes you happy, whatever it is. One of the most important factors which helps prevent resident burnout could be as simple as just spending uninterrupted time away from the hospital, doing anything that brings you joy.

In medical school, I conducted a study examining the levels of burnout amongst the students at my school. I also asked my fellow medical students to describe what they believed was contributing to their burnout. My findings were not very surprising. Burnout was relatively high, especially near the STEP exams and during certain 3rd year clerkships. The factors which most contributed to burnout were increased work hours and performing work which was felt to be "unimportant" (i.e. work which didn't directly correlate to higher exam scores or clinical care). I think these factors still apply to residents as well. Those weeks where you truly test the boundaries of our work hour restrictions or those 24-hour call shifts you spend writing endless consult notes in the middle of the night can be draining. We can't avoid these difficulties in residency, but we can control how we spend our time away from the hospital and make every effort to avoid bringing work home with us.

As an example of spending time away from the hospital (and to celebrate our graduating chiefs) we recently went to an indoor rock-climbing gym as a group. There were certainly some great athletes who scaled the walls as if they have been practicing their ninja skills regularly. But there were also those of us who just focused on having a good time enjoying one another's company and occasionally enjoying a good laugh when a certain resident hilariously rolled down the walls (yes I fell ... and there is video). When things get hard, just remember we are all in this together. Look to your co-residents for help when you need it. And make every effort to prioritize what makes you happy.

- Alex Erbella, MD, PGY-2 General Surgery Resident