The Well Physician

Physician health and wellness is a critical issue with wide reaching impact throughout the health care system. Publication of the 2014 AAP Clinical Report on Physician Health and Wellness provided an opening for discussion of the topic with the goal of shifting outdated perceptions that it is taboo. In fact, physician health is central to the success and longevity of physicians in practice and in training, and directly impacts the wellbeing of the patients in their care. We in the field of pediatrics have a unique opportunity to lead change in the culture of medicine as one of the first specialties to adopt revised ACGME core competencies developed in conjunction with the American Board of Pediatrics through the Pediatric Milestone Project. Language used in the new competencies clearly emphasizes the wellbeing of pediatric trainees, and specifically mentions healthy nutrition, sleep, physical activity, self-regulation skills, and mindfulness as essential elements of pediatric training. This is a far cry from my early training, where the expectation of unflagging endurance was the unrealistic norm. The reasons for raising awareness of the topic are important. Like too many of us, I have had the experience of losing colleagues and friends in the medical field to suicide – and this is, in a word, unacceptable. The wellbeing and mental health of pediatricians matters tremendously. We must take immediate steps to care for ourselves and for one another. This will take leadership, shifting from complacency to action, modeling new behaviors, learning new skills, and encouraging each other to do better. Pediatricians have a history of great passion for our work. Let’s turn the lens on ourselves and be the specialty that changes the medical culture for those coming after us and serve as role models and resources to colleagues in other specialties. My intention is that this column will help pediatricians stay abreast of emerging research in physician health and wellness, learn about concrete skills that can be applied to address burnout, and initiate a paradigm shift to preventive physician wellness that honors both our patients and ourselves. Raising awareness is the first step.

Take good care,

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