

Risk Management & Patient Safety News

Physician Wellness Survey

by Laurie Reynard, MD

Much has been written about physician wellness - and rightfully so. A 2009 Lancet article entitled "Physician Wellness: A Missing Quality Indicator" described the issue this way: "When physicians are unwell, the performance of health care systems can be suboptimum. Physician wellness might not only benefit the individual physician, it could also be vital to the delivery of high-quality health care."¹

Last fall, the CAP Education/CME Committee generated a Physician Wellness Survey in which more than 600 CAP physicians participated. The purpose was to determine how CAP physicians were coping in terms of both economic and personal issues. The goal was to determine how CAP could best provide direction to physician members who might be in emotional distress.

This article shares the outcome of that survey.

Average Age of Survey Participants

The average age of a CAP member is 51. The majority of survey participants – 80 percent – were between the ages of 41 and 70. Of this majority group, the largest group, 31.6 percent, were between the ages of 51-60.

Other Noteworthy Participant Demographics

- 70 percent were male;
- 74 percent had been in practice 11 years or more years
- 51 percent had been in practice 21 years or more
- 55 percent were solo practitioners
- All medical specialties eligible for CAP membership were represented

Top Ranking Stressors -- Professional Issues

The most interesting results were the participants' ranking of stressors by the magnitude of the impact on their life. The number one stressor under "Professional Issues" was *Decreasing Reimbursements!* This is no surprise to any practicing physician. The remaining stressors in this category were as follows:

2. Paperwork
3. Time demands/long hours
4. Patient demands/attitudes
5. Litigation/malpractice concerns
6. Loss of autonomy
7. Defensive medicine
8. Demands of call
9. Electronic medical records

Top Ranking Stressors -- Administrative Issues

In the "Administrative Issues" category, the number one ranked stressor was *Bureaucratic Control/Regulation (Medicare, CMS, OSHA, HIPAA)*. It was followed by:

2. Dealing with third party payers
3. Business/administrative issues

Top Ranking Stressors -- Personal Issues

When CAP physicians thought about stressors in the "Personal Issues" area, the number one issue was *lack of personal time*. The next highest concerns were:

2. The Global Economic downturn
3. Personal life issues (spouse, parents, and children)


Considering the stress factors noted above, it was not surprising to find that almost half (48 percent) of this sample group of CAP physicians work more than 50 hours per week.

Sadly, 41 percent of the responding physicians also admitted experiencing burnout and 47 percent said that the demands of practice had caused them to consider a drastic change, such as leaving practice or moving to a different location.

Despite these sobering revelations, there was good news gained from the survey as well. A majority of CAP physicians who responded to the survey (69 percent) make time for exercise, hobbies, and religious or social activities on a weekly basis. These included almost any activity imaginable - relaxing at home, playing with the kids, the dog; or on a solo sport like skiing and running, quiet meditation, and photography, to name just a few. CAP physicians seemed to appreciate the value of activities that take them away from medicine for a while each week.

In the end, CAP members revealed that they are most interested in wellness-related educational topics in area of financial health and work/life balance issues.

With the above results in mind, the CAP Education/CME Committee is exploring ways that our organization can be supportive of these needs and interests. Potential ideas include providing articles on wellness and related topics for physicians on CAP's corporate website and in *CAPsules*, our monthly member newsletter, as well as providing web links to appropriate sites, and, potentially, an evening program.

Stay tuned! 

¹The Lancet, Volume 374, Issue 9702, Pages 1714 - 1721, 14 November 2009