

ABSTRACT: 2023 ELAM Institutional Action Project

Project Title: Development of a Group Peer Support Network for a Distributive Model College of Medicine.

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Topic Category: Faculty Development.

Background, Significance of Project:

Physician burnout is a serious problem that was present before, but has escalated since, the COVID-19 pandemic. Many professional organizations including the American Medical Association (AMA) and American College of Physicians (ACP) have made many efforts to promote provider well-being to prevent the mass exodus of clinicians, educators, researchers, and allied health partners. Support is needed not only at the national level but also at the institutional level. Resources at the institutional level are needed to prevent healthcare workers from feeling isolated, hopeless, and helpless.

Purpose/Objectives:

The objective of this project is to develop and launch a voluntary and confidential group peer support network where faculty in education, research, community engagement, and clinical realms across all of Drexel's seven regional campuses can have conversations with each other about life and work stressors.

Methods/Approach/Evaluation Strategy:

A needs-assessment survey that included validated questions from the UCLA Loneliness Scale was created and administered to the DUCOM faculty. Chairs and other senior leaders were informed of this project and were also invited to participate in the survey. A charter for the peer support network was shared with senior faculty leaders and all faculty completing the survey. A psychologist with experience in facilitating group support dynamics was recruited. The next step is to pilot the peer support network at two of DUCOM's regional campuses. The pilot results will be analyzed and processes refined before full implementation of the program at other regional campuses. Quarterly post-intervention surveys will be administered to determine the effectiveness of the group peer support network.

Outcomes/Results:

The needs-assessment survey confirmed that there is a need for more support at the institutional level for our faculty. Only 12.1% of respondents are satisfied with current wellness programs at Drexel. While significant minorities agree they have a resource to discuss stressful days with colleagues (35.3%) and can express their emotions at work (27.3%), these are still minorities, and an overwhelming majority (74.7%) find the idea of a group support network appealing (only 6% disagree). Also, many people answered they would attend voluntary meetings, held mid-day rather than before or after the workday, with a facilitator present.

Discussion/Conclusion with Statement of Impact/Potential Impact:

The successful launch of a confidential voluntary group peer support network at Drexel would provide Drexel faculty with a resource to alleviate the sense of isolation and to encourage dialogue and discussion among peers, who will learn skills needed to promote better management of stressful situations. Drexel University College of Medicine will be among the few academic medical centers to have a best-practice group peer support network for healthcare workers, a resource that may help with both retention and recruitment of faculty.