

Physicians Unite to Address and Combat Moral Injury



Depression, suicidal ideation, burnout, and moral injury are increasingly prevalent among physicians within the U.S. healthcare system.

The Journal of Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine (JPRM), published by IOS Press, features a compilation of articles addressing the stressors contributing to moral injury among physicians practicing paediatric rehabilitation medicine, as well as the broader healthcare professional community.

Guest Editor of this issue of JPRM, Joline Brandenburg, MD, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, writes about the concept of moral injury, explaining that “the concept of moral injury shifts the blame of burnout from the physician and their ‘inability to cope’ to healthcare organizations and systems”.

The burden of non-directive patient clinical care activities encompasses revenue generation, administrative challenges related to the EMR, patient satisfaction metrics, and health insurance barriers. This burden can contribute to moral injuries, burnout, depression, and even suicide among physicians, underscoring the urgent need for meaningful reforms. Such reforms should be led by legislation, hospital administration, and licensing authorities to address and mitigate the distress that can lead to physician suicides.

The guest editors of this issue advocate for action to destigmatize mental health issues among physicians, emphasising the need to overcome the historical shame and silence surrounding mental illness in medicine. Many clinicians, who experience moral injury, understand what patients need but are often unable to provide it due to constraints imposed by healthcare systems. These ongoing strains are unsustainable and impact both physicians and patients.

They recommend a multimodal approach to adjust healthcare system expectations of physicians, promote a wellness-centered culture, and create an environment that encourages open and transparent discussions about the adverse effects of excessive corporatisation of medicine on physician burnout rates.

By implementing appropriate interventions, a supportive environment is created for physicians to better address their challenges and openly discuss their journey towards recovery from vulnerabilities. While there has been a focus on addressing wellness for physicians in training, a proactive and systematic approach to the well-being of all physicians has been lacking.

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