



Wisconsin Medical Society

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Burnout among Wisconsin physicians exceeds 50 percent, threatens patients' access to care

Madison, Wis—Nearly 54 percent of Wisconsin physicians are experiencing burnout—a rate that surpasses national benchmarks, according to a [special report](#) published in the current issue of [WMJ](#).

The Wisconsin Medical Society (Society), in conjunction with the American Medical Association (AMA), conducted a survey of 1,165 Wisconsin physicians to assess the severity of physician burnout and its contributing factors. Results indicate that not only is burnout on the rise, but 47 percent of Wisconsin physicians plan to decrease their clinical hours or retire in the next five years. In comparison, 47 percent of physicians reported some degree of burnout in 2014 and 41 percent planned to reduce hours or retire.

“This is a very real problem, because it affects not only physicians, their families and the entire health care team, but patients as well,” said Society President Molli Rolli, MD. “That’s why the Society’s top priority is not only increasing awareness of this issue but identifying its systemic causes and working to address them.”

Based on survey responses, the major contributors to physician burnout include:

- Frustration with electronic health records (EHR), combined with increasing insurance and government regulations.
- Loss of autonomy and lack of a supportive practice environment.
- Poor work/life balance.

“These findings aren’t that surprising,” said Society CEO Clyde “Bud” Chumbley, MD, MBA. “Practicing medicine has changed tremendously in the last decade, particularly in Wisconsin with the emergence of increasingly large health systems. The physician/patient relationship is increasingly influenced by the EHR and health system policies and not always for the best.”

To address the issue, the Society has identified four key priorities in 2019:

- 1) Convening stakeholders to improve the functionality of electronic health records.
- 2) Developing and encouraging physician leadership opportunities.
- 3) Create a Center for Physician Empowerment to unite stakeholders and lead system change through collective education and action.
- 4) Pursue legislation to establish a Physician Health Program.

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“No one entity or issue is to blame for physician burnout; if we’re going to reverse this tide it’s going to take hard work from a diverse group: health care systems and their executives, insurers, government entities, EHR vendors and physicians themselves,” said Dr. Chumbley. “As the only organization representing Wisconsin physicians regardless of specialty or employment, the Society’s top priority is convening these stakeholders to create and implement solutions so that physicians can continue to do what they do best: take care of patients.”

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With over 12,500 members dedicated to the best interests of their patients, the [Wisconsin Medical Society](#) is the largest association of medical doctors in the state and a trusted source for health policy leadership since 1841.

Published through a partnership between the Wisconsin Medical Society, the Medical College of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, [WMJ](#) is a peer-reviewed publication devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in the Midwest.