

Transcending burnout

Find the path to joy and a fuller life



F063 – Self Care in Healthcare: Beyond Burnout to Finding Fulfillment
Saturday, March 18 | 1–3 p.m.
Location: Room 276

Kelly M. Cordoro, MD, FAAD, professor of dermatology and pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco



Treating yourself so you can treat others better

Dermatologists and other health care workers are at an inflection point, and their health and well-being are on the line, according to Dr. Cordoro. Physicians are incredibly resilient and selfless and will rise to the occasion no matter what is asked of them, she said. “This is great for your patients and teams but can be destructive to you as an individual. There’s no better time to afford ourselves time for self-reflection, personal awareness, and professional enrichment that goes beyond medical topics.”

“We level up and work harder, do more, and continue to give. But there is a breaking point. If you feel you are near it, or want to avoid it, attend this session. If you want to connect and reconnect with your core values, attend this session,” she said.

Burnout versus wellness

This afternoon’s session is not a session on burnout, Dr. Cordoro warned. Rather, the session focuses on the “deeply personal and dynamic nature of individual perspectives, values, and the road to joy in work and life.”

“Our personal impressions of well-being, our perspectives on work and life satisfaction, and our needs and wants change over time. Our view of well-being is shaped by our perceptions and the lens through which we view the world,” she said. “It is important to recognize that, and recognize that even though happiness is related to, and even used in some definitions of wellness, wellness as a concept is so much broader than happiness alone.”

Growth is a universal human value, and this afternoon’s session embraces a growth mindset.

“We cannot wait for the ‘big fix’ to the frustrating systemic issues we face in medicine, we must connect to core values,” Dr. Cordoro said. “Although access to outstanding occupational wellness programs to ameliorate ‘burnout’ abound, and can be helpful, true wellbeing starts from within.”

Today’s session will also discuss mental health, an important dialogue, given the prevalence of depression and suicide in medicine, including dermatology, she said.

“I truly think the session will be a change-maker for those who come prepared to take a reflective, deep dive into their own core values and start to align their choices with their self-identified drivers of joy and meaning,” she said. ●

It’s 2023 and physicians are becoming burned out on the topic of professional burnout. The truth is: the structure of the health care system and its impact on physician well-being is unlikely to change. But physicians can change the course of their own, personal journey, according to Kelly M. Cordoro, MD, FAAD, professor of dermatology and pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco.

Dr. Cordoro is moving the discussion away from the structural and institutional causes of burnout to the individual journey in achieving joy. She leads a robust dialogue on the topic during today’s session, “F063 – Self Care in Healthcare: Beyond Burnout to Finding Fulfillment.” Even with an array of wellness initiatives in place, physicians remain exhausted and disengaged.

“When our values and beliefs are aligned with our work, there is deep meaning and career/work satisfaction despite structural obstacles and frustrations. In contrast to the many medical professionals who are deeply satisfied and enriched by their work, there are some who are not. We have the power to change that, and it largely comes from within,” Dr. Cordoro said.

Self-reflection can be empowering

Dr. Cordoro believes that the same forces that shape us as people shape us as doctors. “Our circle of influence includes our core beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and environment.” In medicine, physicians face tremendous pressure to “conform and fall in line as we march along the training and career path largely under the influence of others.” Everyone in our professional circle, from colleagues and supervisors to role models and mentors, will influence our decisions and activities.

There is always an opportunity to reshape your career and life by figuring out who you are and what brings you meaning, she said. Of course, it requires a willingness and the time to take a deep personal dive into what brought you to medicine in the first place, the areas that feel energizing, and those that feel stifling.

“Honest self-appraisal is the first step to developing a true understanding of our personal values and beliefs and aligning our choices and actions accordingly. This work is empowering, and can be life- and career-altering, in a good way!” Dr. Cordoro said.

Keep pace with your personal journey

There are big and small ways to create change. It starts with “rethinking your focus and re-arranging your plate toward a more favorable balance,” Dr. Cordoro said. Session speaker and Batavia, Illinois clinical psychologist Amy MacDonald, PsyD, will present attendees with a self-reflection exercise designed to identify core values and gain perspectives and skills to increase fulfillment and meaning in work and life. The session goals are to:

Determine which of your beliefs and actions are productive and bring joy/satisfaction and which may sustain a destructive or unhealthy pattern.

Develop skills and perspectives that restore meaning in your work by realigning your work with your core values.

Distinguish between environmental and host factors that contribute to joy or dissatisfaction. Environmental factors are the systems, structures, organizations, people, and culture around us that influence us, while host factors are intrinsic to the person.

