



McGill

**Faculty of
Medicine and
Health Sciences**

**Faculté de
médecine et des
sciences de la santé**



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE

We've been through a lot in the last few years, and we're exhausted. We need to recognize the effects of stress on ourselves/families, colleagues, and larger health care teams and talk about how hard things have been (and continue to be) beyond passing exchanges in the hallway.

This month's newsletter shines a spotlight on an uncomfortable topic and highlights some steps that can be taken to optimise our own wellness, ensure self-care, and build resilience so that both our personal and professional needs are met.

WELLNESS CORNER – A FOCUS ON PHYSICIAN MENTAL HEALTH

With World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10th, and World Mental Health Day on October 10th, this seems like the opportune time to address some specific issues related to our individual and collective mental health.

In the course of our day to day work we are accustomed to discussing issues around mental health and suicide, and routinely provide compassionate care to our patients and connect them to the support and services that they need. Yet, we often struggle to acknowledge these same issues in ourselves or our colleagues and attend to them with a different sense of openness and imperative.

As physicians, we already know that our collective risk of suicide is higher than that of the general population. Like other members of the population, we deal with stressful and sometimes complicated lives outside work. Many physicians, both staff and trainees, experience acute and chronic medical conditions, including mental health issues. But as Emergency

Physicians, we are also charged with the care of others, and are required to provide this care in the context of a system that is under-resourced, under-staffed, and under-supported. These chronic deficiencies in our health care system, and the burdens compounded during these past years of the pandemic, have had huge effects on physician wellness, including an increase in physician burnout, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideations.

In the recently released Canadian Medical Association's (CMA) 2021 National Physician Health Survey, more than half of respondents rated their overall mental health as 'moderate' or 'languishing', which was a significant change compared to 2017 where more than 64% self-identified as 'flourishing'. Over half of respondents reported symptoms of burnout (1.7 times higher compared with pre-pandemic levels), one-quarter reported moderate to severe levels of anxiety, while almost half of respondents screened positive for depression. More than one-third reported having had thoughts of suicide at some point in their life, and fourteen percent reported having had thoughts of suicide over the past 12 months. Of note, all these measures were substantially worse compared to the prior survey results from 2017.

Within medicine there is a powerful stigma around mental health and suicide. Physicians often struggle with feelings of shame and may hesitate to seek help for fear of being seen as weak within a medical culture that has traditionally touted values of self-sufficiency & stoicism. There may be privacy concerns, or fear of potential reprimand, loss of employment or reputation. Some may think the situation isn't severe enough, or simply may be unsure of where to turn for help. In addition, even when a colleague is visibly struggling, people often fear intervening. But taking a moment to reach out to someone, to listen and support them, can potentially change the course of their life.

If you or someone you know is struggling, whether it be with thoughts of suicide, or other difficult life or mental health issues, **help is available**. Reach out to someone you trust to start the conversation or consider contacting one of the hotlines or peer support resources listed below. You can also reach out to a Wellness representative or peer supporter at your site or another site within the McGill DEM Wellness family.

We really are in this together. Be safe, be well, reach out and support one another.

Additional Information:

1. "Physician, heal thyself", CMAJ October 18, 2021. Dr. Tim Graham, Emergency Physician in Alberta, penned an honest open letter about his own struggles with mental health and suicidal ideations. <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/193/41/E1601>
2. Dr. Geoff Toogood, Cardiologist in Australia and founder of CrazySocks4docs, speaks candidly about his own experiences with suicidal ideation and how he got help. (First video link at the top of the page) <https://www.crazysocks4docs.com.au/articles-media/>
3. "The Silent Stigma Around Suicide", CMA Wellness Hub. <https://www.cma.ca/physician-wellness-hub/content/physician-suicide-stigma>

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4. “Physician Burnout: Assessing and addressing its impact on your family”
<https://www.urologytimes.com/view/physician-burnout-assessing-and-addressing-its-impact-on-your-family>
5. Health-care specific resources to learn more about Supporting psychological health & safety in the Healthcare environment. <https://theworkingmind.ca/healthcare-resources>

Hotlines and Resources for Assistance (QC):

Besoin D’Aide

1-866-APPELLE (277-3553) (Hotline available 24/7)

Their website also offers a place for live chat and provides other resources within Quebec.

<https://besoinaide.ca/ligne-1866appelle/> (On line live chat)

<https://besoinaide.ca/bottin-des-ressources/> (resources)

Suicide Action Montreal

1-866-APPELLE (277-3553)

514-723-4000 (24-hour service)

Offers support services, crisis workers and monitoring for people who are at risk of committing suicide, for their friends and family and for people affected by suicide.

Suicide.ca

Text line 1-855-957-5353 (Hotline assistance via 1-866-APPELLE)

Online chat via <https://suicide.ca/>

Talk Suicide Canada

1-833-456-4566 (Hotline available 24/7), Text 45645 (available 4p-12a)

<https://talksuicide.ca/>

<https://talksuicide.ca/community-resources?province=QC&keyword>

Quebec Physician’s Health Program (PAMQ):

Help Line 1-514-397-0888 (Montreal)/ 1-800-387-4166 (Rest of Quebec) (free and available 365d/y)

<https://www.pamq.org/>

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention (CASP/ACPS)

Offers a wealth of information and resources for people who may be having thoughts of suicide, those who are concerned about the safety of someone else, those trying to help attempt survivors and those living with loss from suicide. <https://suicideprevention.ca/>

CMA Physician Wellness Hub

Includes a wealth of resources on issues related to physician wellness

<https://www.cma.ca/physician-wellness-hub>

Resources for Residents

McGill WELL Office

Provides an array of services to medical trainees including counselling services and links to a number of resources offered by the WELL Office, McGill, and other outside organizations.

<https://www.mcgill.ca/thewelloffice/>

<https://www.mcgill.ca/thewelloffice/emergencies> (offers a list of other support services, including many of those already listed above, for both the Montreal and Outaouais Campuses)

KeepMeSafe (McGill)

A mental health counselling service that specializes in student mental health support and provides access to in-person counselling appointments, 24/7 access to counsellors via telephone and mobile chat, and mental health care in over 60 languages.

<https://ssmu.ca/blog/2020/03/mental-health-resource-available-keep-mesafe/>

The Wellness Hub

514-398-6017

Open weekdays 8:30 am-4 pm.

Offer professional, confidential counselling. Students must contact the Hub directly during business hours for support.

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