

HEALTHCARE WORKER WELLBEING:

Making the System Work for Healthcare Workers



BURNOUT IS REAL—ADDRESSING IT SO HEALTHCARE WORKERS CAN THRIVE GOES BEYOND OFFERING INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT RESOURCES.

From how a hospital is staffed to time-consuming clicks in electronic health records, processes and policies can affect a hospital's ability to create a safe, healthy environment for its workforce. How hospital leaders run their departments directly impacts their ability to have a strong workplace culture, cultivate an engaged workforce, and deliver high-quality, safe patient care.

Addressing workplace policies and practices is the best way to reduce burnout and support healthcare workers' wellbeing. Additionally, it optimizes patient outcomes and addresses costs associated with staff turnover, lost revenue, and threats to a hospital's long-term viability.ⁱ

MOVING BEYOND INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE

While many hospitals have made strides to address healthcare workers' wellbeing, it is critical to go beyond encouraging self-care.ⁱⁱ Hospitals need support as they adjust and create systems that sustain worker wellbeing.

For more than 50 years, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has empowered employers, including hospital leaders, with the strategies and resources critical to creating sustainable, safe workplaces. That is why NIOSH and its partners are at the forefront of working with hospital leaders on developing and implementing customized, hospital-specific solutions to reduce healthcare worker burnout.

This fall, NIOSH is:

- **Launching a national campaign with free, evidence-informed resources** to help hospital leaders:
 - Think differently about how to maximize existing resources,
 - Fine-tune current processes, and
 - Establish new policies at their hospital that include wellbeing as a key performance indicator.
- **Developing an actionable guide, tested in real-world settings**, to help hospital leaders implement systems-level changes, from revising existing processes to making it safe for staff to access mental health care.



LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

One of the most substantial systems barriers to healthcare worker wellbeing is intrusive mental health questions on hospital credentialing applications.^{iii,v} Healthcare workers fear losing their credentials because of overly broad and invasive mental health questions that are stigmatizing and discriminatory.^{iv}

Nearly 4 in 10 physicians were either afraid or knew another physician fearful of seeking mental

health care because of questions asked in licensure, credentialing, or insurance applications.^v

Like everyone, healthcare workers deserve the right to pursue the mental health care they may need, without fear of losing their job. In fact, The Joint Commission does not require organizations to ask about a worker's mental health history and encourages them to not do so.^{vi} The Federation of State Medical Boards also recommends against such questions on credentialing forms.^{vii}

START NOW WITH TOOLS FROM THE DR. LORNA BREEN HEROES' FOUNDATION

The [Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation](#) developed [three simple steps](#) hospital leaders can follow to remove this barrier and make it safe for their healthcare workers to seek the care they may need.



AUDIT

all credentialing applications, addendums, and peer review forms.



CHANGE

any invasive or stigmatizing language around mental health.



COMMUNICATE

these changes back to the workers and assure healthcare workers that it is safe for them to seek care.

BECOMING A WELLBEING FIRST CHAMPION FOR CREDENTIALING, SPONSORED BY ALL IN: WELLBEING FIRST FOR HEALTHCARE

[ALL IN: WellBeing First for Healthcare](#), an independent coalition of healthcare organizations led by the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, is recognizing hospitals for taking these three steps to remove intrusive mental health questions from credentialing applications. To become a WellBeing First Champion for Credentialing by September, [submit](#) your credentialing applications to the ALL IN coalition for verification.

Removing intrusive questions on credentialing applications is a critical step to supporting healthcare worker wellbeing, but it is not the only one. Systems change for improved healthcare worker wellbeing is an ongoing effort. As hospital leaders expand on these initiatives, NIOSH looks forward to providing the needed resources to make every hospital a safe, healthy, and sustainable workplace for all.



To receive updates and resources from NIOSH's upcoming healthcare worker wellbeing campaign, sign up for the *Total Worker Health*® mailing list [here](#).

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- ii. American Hospital Association [2021]. AHA Hospitals in Action: Supporting Care Teams. Washington, DC: American Hospital Association, <https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2021/03/ln-playbook-companion-0321.pdf>
- iii. Weston MJ, Nordberg A [2022]. Stigma: A barrier in supporting nurse well-being during the pandemic. *Nurse Lead* 20(2):174-178. doi: 10.1016/j.mnl.2021.10.008.
- iv. Jones J, North C, Vogel-Scibilia S, Myers M, Owen R [2018]. Medical licensure questions about mental illness and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 46(4):458-471. <https://jaapl.org/content/46/4/458>
- v. The Physicians Foundation [2022]. 2022 survey of America's physicians: Part two of three: Understanding the state of physicians' wellbeing and assessing solutions to address it. Boston, MA: The Physicians Foundation, <https://physiciansfoundation.org/physician-and-patient-surveys/the-physicians-foundation-2022-physician-survey-part-2/>.
- vi. The Joint Commission [2020]. Joint commission statement on removing barriers to mental health care for clinicians and health care staff. Oakbrook Terrace, IL: The Joint Commission, <https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/covid19/statement-on-removing-barriers-to-mental-health-care-for-clinicians-and-health-care-staff.pdf>.
- vii. Federation of State Medical Boards [2018] Physician wellness and burnout. Washington, DC: Federation of State Medical Boards. <https://www.fsmb.org/siteassets/advocacy/policies/policy-on-wellness-and-burnout.pdf>.