

Book Review

The Art and Science of Physician Wellbeing: A Handbook for Physicians and Trainees

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	<p>Review by: Saowalag Churueng, Pakorn Akkakanjanasupar</p> <p>Book Title: “The Art and Science of Physician Wellbeing: A Handbook for Physicians and Trainees”</p> <p>Editors: Laura Weiss Roberts, Mickey Trockel</p> <p>Publisher: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2019</p> <p>Publication: 287 pages, 1st edition printed in 2019</p> <p>ISBN: 978-3-319-42135-3 (eBook) 978-3-319-42134-6 (Print)</p>
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"The Art and Science of Physician Wellbeing" is a profound and timely contribution to the ever-growing body of literature addressing the critical issues of physician burnout and mental health. In an era where the pressures on healthcare professionals are intensifying, this handbook, expertly edited by Laura Weiss Roberts and Mickey Trockel, provides a much-needed, comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted challenges that physicians face in maintaining their wellbeing. The editors bring together an impressive array of contributors who delve into both the systemic and individual factors that influence physician health, offering a holistic perspective that is both rigorous and practical.

The handbook stands out not only for its scholarly depth but also for its commitment to providing actionable strategies grounded in evidence-based research. By focusing on real-world applications, the book serves as a vital resource for healthcare leaders, policymakers, and practitioners who are seeking to create environments that support the mental and physical health of physicians. The structured approach of the book, divided into three well-defined sections, allows for a thorough examination of key aspects of physician wellbeing: the professional culture within medicine, the various threats to physician wellbeing, and the development of resilience strategies.

Each section of the book builds upon the last, creating a narrative that guides the reader through a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions. The first section delves into the cultural norms of the medical profession and the importance of fostering a culture that prioritizes physician wellbeing. The second section addresses the myriad threats that can undermine this wellbeing, including burnout, mistreatment, and the pressures of modern medical practice. Finally, the third section offers strategies for resilience, providing both theoretical insights and practical tools for fostering a supportive and healthy work environment.

Part I: Advancing Professional Calling and the Culture of Wellbeing in Medicine

Cultural Norms and Compassion: The book begins by addressing the deeply entrenched cultural norms within the medical profession, particularly the expectation that physicians must place patient care above their own wellbeing. This longstanding ethos, while noble in intent, has contributed to widespread burnout and diminished mental health among healthcare providers. The opening chapters underscore the critical need to shift this culture by fostering

a more balanced approach that includes compassion—not only for patients but also for oneself. By cultivating self-compassion and empathy for colleagues, the medical profession can enhance physician wellbeing, ultimately leading to improved healthcare quality and outcomes.

Part II: Recognizing Threats to Physician Wellbeing

This section delves deeply into the numerous threats that compromise physician wellbeing, with a particular focus on burnout and mistreatment. The book explores how systemic issues—such as the demands of long working hours, high emotional labor, and the pervasive culture of stigmatizing errors—are central contributors to physician burnout. These stressors are further exacerbated by the hierarchical and often punitive environments in which many physicians work, where mistakes are not just learning opportunities but are frequently met with shame and criticism.

Additionally, the prevalence of mistreatment in medical training and practice, including bullying, harassment, and discrimination, is highlighted as a significant and often overlooked factor in the deterioration of mental health among healthcare professionals. This mistreatment not only affects individual physicians but also creates a toxic work environment that can impede collaboration, reduce job satisfaction, and ultimately compromise patient care.

The section also examines the impact of technological and financial pressures. The integration of Electronic Health Records (EHRs), while intended to improve efficiency, has often resulted in increased clerical burdens that reduce time for meaningful patient interactions, further contributing to physician dissatisfaction and burnout. Financial stressors, such as overwhelming student loan debt and the ongoing anxiety about financial security, are also identified as critical factors that undermine physician wellbeing. The discussion underscores the necessity for comprehensive support systems that can address these multifaceted challenges, highlighting the importance of systemic change alongside individual resilience strategies.

Part III: Fostering Physician Resilience

Building Resilience Through Relationships and Mindfulness: The final section of the book zeroes in on practical strategies that physicians can use to build resilience, which is crucial for maintaining their wellbeing over the long term. The authors highlight the importance of having strong relationships and support networks, both at work and at home. These connections can be a real lifeline, helping doctors navigate the stresses of their profession by offering both emotional and practical support. Whether it's a trusted colleague who understands the unique pressures of the job or family members who provide comfort and care, these relationships play a vital role in preventing burnout.

Mindfulness also takes center stage as a powerful tool for managing stress and staying emotionally balanced. The book emphasizes that by practicing mindfulness regularly, physicians can gain better control over their thoughts and emotions, helping them remain calm and focused, even in the most demanding situations. This kind of emotional stability is key to thriving in the high-pressure environment of medicine.

On top of mental health strategies, the book gives straightforward advice on staying physically healthy. It stresses the importance of the basics—regular exercise, good nutrition, and enough sleep—as the foundation for overall wellbeing. By taking care of their physical health, physicians can ensure they have the energy and resilience needed to meet the demands of their profession.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The book is built around the Stanford model of wellbeing and professional fulfillment, which serves as its guiding framework. This model brings together three key areas: personal resilience, a culture of wellness, and the efficiency of practice. These elements are intertwined, creating a holistic view of what it takes to maintain physician wellbeing. The editors have done a great job of bringing together insights from various experts, each offering practical, evidence-based strategies that can be applied in real-world settings. The methodology used in the book is solid, drawing on a mix of case studies, empirical research, and practical applications to back up its claims.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Arguments and Evidence

One of the book's standout strengths is its comprehensive approach. It doesn't just look at individual resilience or organizational change in isolation; instead, it bridges the gap between the two, offering a full-spectrum view of the challenges and how to tackle them. The editors have curated a wide range of issues, giving readers a deep understanding of the landscape before diving into practical solutions. However, while the book is thorough, it could have gone a bit further in exploring the challenges of implementing these solutions, especially in settings where resources are limited.

Comparison to Existing Literature

When compared to other works on physician burnout and mental health, "The Art and Science of Physician Wellbeing" really shines because of its holistic approach. Many other books tend to focus on either the individual or the system, but this one does a great job of integrating both perspectives. It's in line with recent literature that calls for systemic changes in healthcare to better address physician burnout, similar to what Shanafelt et al. (2017) have argued.

This book made a significant impact on academic discussions around physician wellbeing. It challenges the traditional views within the medical profession and calls for a reevaluation of how physician work environments are structured. The fact that it's grounded in evidence and offers practical recommendations makes it a valuable resource for scholars, healthcare leaders, and policymakers who are serious about improving the wellbeing of those on the front lines of healthcare.

The Art and Science of Physician Wellbeing is a well-rounded and impactful contribution to the literature on physician mental health and wellbeing. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by physicians and presents practical, evidence-based solutions. While the book could delve deeper into the barriers to implementing these changes, its overall contribution to the field is undeniable. This volume is highly recommended for scholars, healthcare professionals, and policymakers dedicated to enhancing the wellbeing of those who care for others.

Reference

Roberts, L. W., & Trockel, M. (Eds.). (2019). *The art and Science of physician wellbeing: A handbook for physicians and trainees*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG.