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The Gamification of a Surgical Department: A Novel Wellness Initiative

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Keywords

Internship and Residency;

Abstract

Physicians have double the risk of death by suicide as compared to the general population, and suicide is the only cause of death in physicians that is more frequent than it is in non-physicians.¹ Burnout has been noted to be a risk factor for suicide in physicians and is exacerbated by lack of control, lack of meaning in work, and low resource availability.^{1,2} Although these statistics are alarming, we firmly believe that “engagement is the antithesis of burnout.”³ One way that we know can help with engagement is by cultivating community. The goal of our project is to cultivate community within the surgical department via the “gamification” of surgical training. “Gamification” has been a trending topic in education literature and has started to be studied in resident education, with promising results showing improved outcomes with gamification of existing structures.⁴

We have created a new, department wide initiative with the goal of building social relationships throughout the department of surgery called “The Torch Tournament”. We have struggled with social connection since COVID, and in the era of virtual meetings, social connection has been disincentivized. We believe that new enticement for existing tasks will bring more enjoyment to the workplace and realign our program with its values. We aim to facilitate increased morale, decrease burnout, increase team building, and mentorship via increased social connection and community.

The department has been sorted into five teams containing all levels of training (interns through attendings, APPs and staff). The teams work to earn points, together and individually, throughout the year. The points are earned in a variety of ways, including current requirements (attending conferences, completing evaluations, etc.) as well as via activities that facilitate social connections (team dinner, group fitness, etc.).

There will be two mid-year check in points and whichever team has the most points at the time will earn a prize of their choosing. Finally, the games will culminate at the “Torch Tournament” where teams compete in fun, field day-like events to bring more joy to the workplace and determine the overall winner of the year to receive the trophy and end of year celebration party. By randomly assorting the surgical department into teams we aim to facilitate diversity among traditional groups by removing the barriers between training levels to include everyone. By creating more joy in the work place we hope to increase the sense of belonging among the surgical department. By investing in out of work activities we hope to increase the work life integration and overall build a stronger community.

We are currently in the inaugural season of the Torch Tournament. We plan to study its impact with a pre and post survey of participants to measure differences in loneliness and social connection. Additionally, we are monitoring our conferences for increased attendance as the year continues. We do not have any preliminary data yet, however currently the program is operating well and has already increased group connections and morale subjectively.

Learning Objectives

- Describe risk factors for burn out among medical professionals.
- Discover novel ways to facilitate community development.

References

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