

Program aims to build resiliency – and decrease burnout -- in residents

As the clock inches closer to midnight, you're hustling to care for multiple patients. You're admitting one patient, a nurse just paged you to write an order for a patient you are covering, and you need to watch another patient who is having a post-procedure complication. Your stomach is growling, but there's no time for dinner tonight. Your "down" time will be spent drafting a report on a quality improvement project you're leading. You're overwhelmed, unsure, exhausted and wondering, "Is this what burnout feels like?"

The rate of burnout among today's healthcare professionals is exploding. Residency training is a particularly vulnerable time, given the steep learning curve, the newness of it all and the long and busy hours. However, a new interactive curricular series, developed by the Cleveland Clinic Internal Medicine Residency Program faculty, is changing the way residents view and handle burnout.

Called Foundations of Resident Assessment, Mentorship, and Emotional Intelligence, or FRAME, the program aims to help trainees:

- build resilience
- emphasize self-care
- foster meaningful connections and reflections
- challenge assumptions that "it's just me"

Abby Spencer, MD, MS, Director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program, and the late Frank Michota, MD, developed the concept for FRAME in 2014, with the goals of incorporating new and important competencies into the curriculum, making their large Internal Medicine Residency Program feel smaller and promoting deeper connections and relationships between residents and faculty.

"We wanted to truly embed new competencies such as emotional intelligence, teamwork and resilience into our curriculum to promote empathy, self-care, humanism, relationship building, self-awareness and other aspects of emotional intelligence," says Dr. Spencer.

FRAME Program strengthens trust

In a series of small group educational sessions, residents sit face to face and discuss topics such as managing stress; medical education; emotional intelligence; communication and empathy; professionalism; teamwork; leadership; ethics; social justice; and humanism.

Jennifer Ramsey, MD, Associate Director of the Internal Medicine Residency Program, directs FRAME and is pleased by the positive effects on residents and faculty that are emerging from the sessions. "Residents have been surprised by how much they share in experiences, perspectives and feelings," she says. "Thanks to FRAME sessions, residents have begun to realize that the powerful physician experience affects us all similarly, and this realization strengthens trust and encourages openness among them in meaningful ways."

Residents welcome the FRAME experience

The program was implemented in January 2016 and involves five groups of 35 trainees. Each group meets every five weeks in rotation. The small group discussions (five or six residents per group) are facilitated by program faculty.

One facilitator, Ali Mehdi, MD, a former chief resident, explains the importance of this program. “If anything, this tells me that residents have been longing for such a platform — a platform through which they can discuss their challenges with their colleagues who are living in the same boat and with their staff who, too, are in the same ship.”



Resident feedback on FRAME has been overwhelmingly positive. Internal Medicine resident Jamal Mahar, MD, says, “It gives an avenue to discuss and 'loosen up.' I also feel that Dr. Ramsey's presence has had a very positive influence in these sessions, as she is really able to encourage participation and foster that ambience of caring.”

There is a high level of engagement and enthusiasm between the faculty and residents, making FRAME not only beneficial, but also enjoyable. More than a dozen IM faculty have meaningfully participated as FRAME facilitators and they all report benefiting from the experience.

Staff physicians benefit from FRAME, too

To further promote resiliency, residents attend a special FRAME resiliency panel of staff physicians nominated by IM residents based on their ability to:

- manage resiliency and burnout
- nurture personal passion for their work in a setting of constraints and demands
- be affected by their patients' stories and yet keep their hearts open and ready for the next patient

The staff physician panelists have been thoughtful, vulnerable, reflective and open, and the resident questions have been outstanding. To no one's surprise, the staff physicians are getting as much out of the experience of hearing each other's stories as are the residents. Residents are already adopting staff resilience techniques, such as Katie Neuendorf, MD's rule of 10s or Christy Samaras, DO's “water off a duck's back,” and putting them into practice.

FRAME topics can be applied to all healthcare professionals. It is hoped that the IM residency program sessions will eventually be adopted by other programs so that participants can share their experiences, reduce the feeling of burnout and rediscover their passion for why they went into medicine.