

Putting on your oxygen mask

Taking care of your mental health to succeed in PA school

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Objectives

Discuss foundational concepts of wellness

Recognize the challenges to wellness posed by PA training

Describe strategies to improve wellness, including showing vulnerability and purposefully connecting with others

Recognize signs of compromised well-being and act to address a lack of well-being

Background

Burnout rates vary depending on the study being referenced, but are frequently around 50-70% of practicing PAs and physicians

Burnout is typically measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) with three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal achievement



Burnout

Background

Don't believe us?

Burnout is associated with:

- 100% greater risk of medical errors
- 17% greater odds of being named in a malpractice suit
- Higher patient mortality in ICUs
- Lower quality of teamwork
- Longer recovery times for hospital patients post-discharge
- Lower patient satisfaction
- Lower patient adherence to medical advice
- 25% greater odds of alcohol abuse/dependence
- 2x risk of suicidal ideation
 - Male physicians die by suicide at rate 40% greater than other males
 - Female physicians die by suicide at rate 130% greater than other females



So what can we do about it?

Foundational Wellness

What do we mean by wellness?

Common suggestions for being well:

- Run
- Do yoga
- Go for a walk
- Take a break



These are great suggestions...but what is missing?

Foundational Wellness

These are in the moment suggestions!

Do you feel like you are always racing to the next finish line?



Challenges in PA School (and Practice!)

You are all very familiar with these.

It typically all boils down to time, stress, and lack of control.

Also, the rest of your life doesn't stop just because you are in school.

Think of things in terms of risk factors - what is modifiable and what is not?

What does well-being look like?

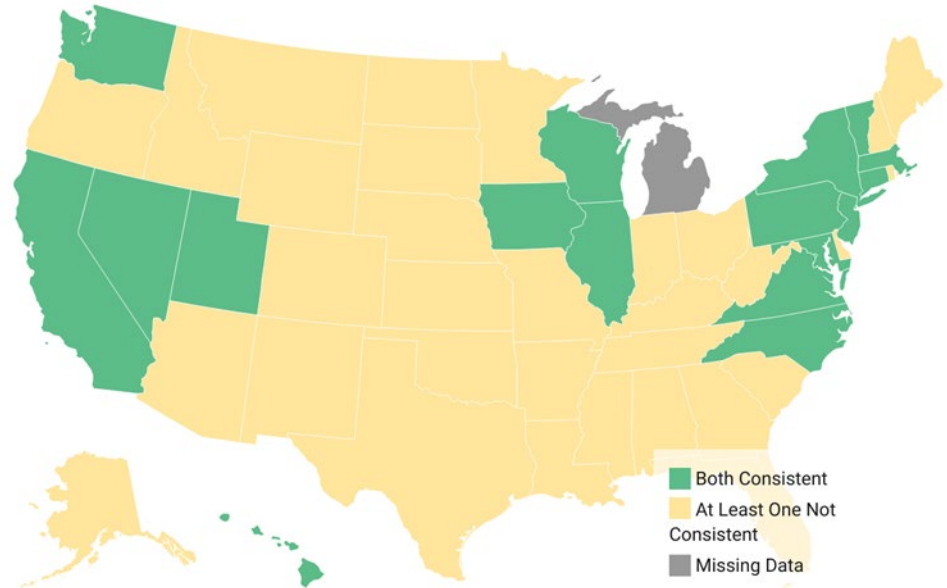


A couple poll questions...

PA Help-Seeking and Licensure Questions

- If you were to need medical help for treatment of a physical ailment, would concerns about the repercussions on your medical licensure make you reluctant to seek formal medical care?
 - Yes (12.0%)
 - No (76.6%),
 - Unsure (11.5%)
- If you were to need medical help for treatment of depression, alcohol/substance use, or other mental health condition, would concerns about the repercussions on your medical licensure make you reluctant to seek formal medical care?
 - Yes (35.2%)
 - No (49.5%)
 - Unsure (15.4%)

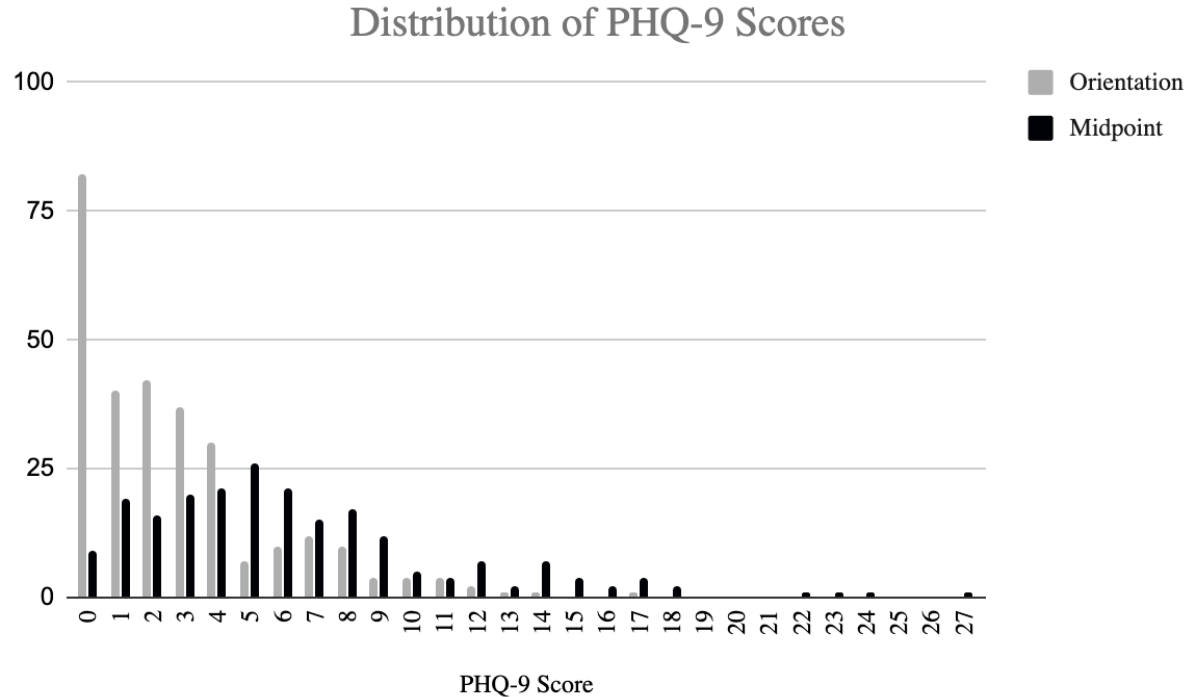
Figure 2. ADA Consistency of PA License Initial and Renewal Applications by State.



District of Columbia (not pictured) had applications that were both consistent.

Created with Datawrapper

The distribution of PHQ-9 scores at orientation and midpoint in the didactic year.



The increase in depression risk is significant...

- PA Students get less likely to seek help and stress/mental health issues worsen

	Orientation (N = 287)	Midpoint (N = 217)
Do you feel confident reaching out for mental health help if you think you needed it?	n (%)	n (%)
Yes	199 (69.3%)	127 (58.5%)
Maybe	80 (27.9%)	71 (32.7%)
No	8 (2.8%)	19 (8.8%)
Do you feel confident knowing what mental health resources are available to you?		
Yes	212 (73.9%)	152 (70.0%)
Some, not confident	60 (20.9%)	54 (24.9%)
No	15 (5.2%)	11 (5.1%)

The increase in depression risk is significant...

- PA Students experience greater suicidal ideation over the course of the didactic year

Thoughts that you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way	Orientation (N = 287)		Midpoint (N = 217)	
	n (%)	PHQ-9 M(SD)	n (%)	PHQ-9 M(SD)
Not at all	277 (96.5%)	2.64 (2.94)	201 (92.6%)	5.79 (4.11)
Several days	10 (3.5%)	7.00 (3.68)	12 (5.5%)	12.17 (5.10)
More than half the days	0 (0.0%)	–	1 (0.5%)	15 (–)
Nearly every day	0 (0.0%)	–	3 (1.4%)	23 (4.58)

Shifting the mindset

What if we shift our attention from reducing burnout to actually improving our own well-being?

What if we make our own mental health as important as our clinical knowledge?

Areas of focus:

- Vulnerability
- Self-reflection
- Creating connection

An exercise to get us started...

When you hear the word vulnerable, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Think about a time that you felt vulnerable

Think about a time that a peer was vulnerable

Think about a time a mentor or superior was vulnerable

Creating a Culture

Right now, you are responsible for creating the culture among your cohort - what does this look like?

Remember this as you move forward into your own practice, what kind of culture do you want to create?

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being Vulnerability

In your PA journey, have you ever felt like you weren't good enough?

Or have you felt exhausted? Burned out? Depressed? Anxious?

Have you struggled with an addiction or other mental illness?

If any of these are true for you...

You are normal!

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being

Vulnerability

Everyone experiences these feelings (and others) at times, but we tend not to share them

But, showing vulnerability leads to more authentic relationships and more personal resilience

Sharing your experiences and story can be cathartic for both the speaker and listener, and can create space for deeper connections

This can also have the effect of reducing the stigma around burnout, personal struggles, and mental health issues in healthcare

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being Vulnerability

Here, we'll show you.

Hopefully, you don't think less of us for those struggles we shared.

Maybe you think we were brave for sharing.

Maybe something one of us said made you feel less alone with the struggles you carry with you.

Sharing Experiences Reduces Stigma!

- After seeing faculty share personal stories of mental health issues, students report
 - Less psychological distance from others
 - Greater likelihood to disclose problems or challenges
 - Greater likelihood to seek help if needed

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being Connection

Effects of loneliness on lifespan can be as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes per day (and more than the risk from obesity, excess alcohol consumption, and lack of exercise). It is associated with greater risk of

- Heart disease
- Depression
 - According to the CDC in 2018, 54% of those that died by suicide have no history of mental illness.
- Anxiety
- Dementia

At work, loneliness reduces performance, limits creativity, and impairs decision-making.

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being Connection

What is loneliness?

- “Subjective feeling that you’re lacking the social connections you need” – this has 3 dimensions
 - Intimate – close confidante/partner
 - Relational – friendship, companionship, and support
 - Collective – a network and community of shared purpose/interests
- Loneliness is not the same as solitude

Loneliness and social isolation are self-perpetuating

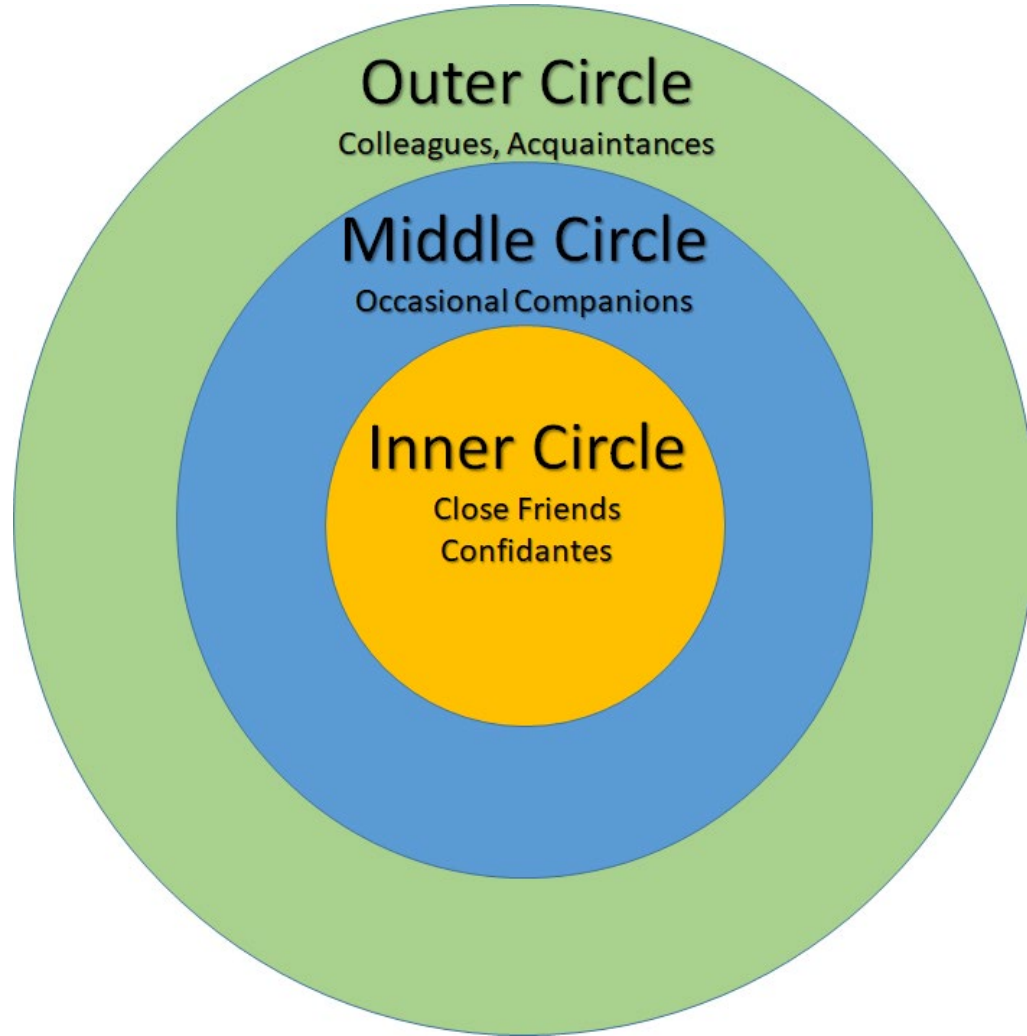
- When we feel lonely, there can be feelings of shame and a tendency to become more withdrawn because of doubt, which makes us feel more lonely...
- And it is experienced by everyone at different times and in different ways

Strategies to Maintain Well-Being Connection

What you can do about feeling lonely

- Connect – whether in person, via teleconference, or on the phone, engage in real conversation and connection with people that are important to you
 - Ask authentic questions and really listen!
 - “What is one thing going really well in your life?”
 - “What is one area where you are struggling?”
- Find a tribe – even (or especially) if your friends and relatives are far away, find a group of close neighbors and friends
- Be honest with yourself – PA school is hard. Everyone struggles at times, but masking your emotions gets in the way of you recognizing your feelings and letting others in to help
- Be kind to yourself – identifying an unmet need is the first step towards making it better!
- Slow down – you are not going to keep up with everything in the news, popular culture, and the world of medicine. That’s okay. Realize that you have limits and boundaries of what is healthy for you, and work to make the other things fit within those boundaries.

Circles of Connection



Our Challenge to You

Take one or two steps out of your comfort zone in an area of wellness where you could grow!

Connection

Map out your inner, middle, and outer circles, then reflect on the level of satisfaction you feel from your connections.

AND/OR

Connect with someone with whom you would like to feel a deeper connection. Ask non-superficial questions (e.g., "what is one thing going really well in your life?") and *really listen*

Vulnerability

Share something personal with a person that you have not shared it before

AND/OR

Call, speak, or write a letter to someone expressing gratitude for touching your life in a positive way

Final Poll

- After you vote, feel free to enter any questions you have in the Q&A
 - If you want to jump on camera and ask it (which is great) – please just type “I have a question/comment to ask live”