

## Article for El Paso Medical Society Newsletter

### Talk to a Doctor: Your Best Medicine!

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We all face times of challenge. Physicians have shown they can remain strong in extraordinary times. The past few years certainly have been challenging for physicians; higher rates of burnout, faced with COVID, staff shortages, etc. We have seen our peers struggle, and have had our own personal battles, yet we come together as a medical community to stay strong. Physicians continue to help others; caretaking remains at the core, but many have difficulties asking for help for themselves.

There are many reasons physicians find it challenging to ask for assistance. They are used to being in charge or at the top of the workplace hierarchy with the expectation to “know all”. Training for physicians encourages the compartmentalization of issues instead of emotional processing. For example, physicians often have to move to the next patient, even when a patient has just passed, there was a bad outcome, or heartbreaking bad news was just given. The workplace may not have a regular time, place or procedure for individual physicians to process their feelings. The typical personality structure of a physician - what makes them so great at their job - is one of intellectualization – having diagnostic rigor, curiosity, detail focus, and life-long learning. But this often leaves emotional struggles on the back burner.

So, who can we turn to? Physicians most readily prefer and are more willing to seek the assistance of peers/other physicians<sup>1</sup>. As a medical community, we need to help our colleagues and be open to assistance from our peers. We need to be vulnerable, reach out to our contemporaries to consult when faced with challenges. Modeling appropriate emotional self-care will encourage others to utilize their colleague resources for their emotional well-being. If you notice a peer struggling, reach out, ask to share a coffee or a walk to have a moment of connection. This truly can make such an impact in one’s struggles, through hope, support, and possible resolution.

If you still do not feel comfortable reaching out to your immediate colleagues, the Colorado Physician Health Program (CPHP) is here for you. You may speak confidentially to a peer physician to consult on any issue that may be troubling you, whether it pertains to workplace problems, personal or family struggles, or health matters. Feel free to call CPHP at 303-860-0122 to speak to a physician today. Physicians are our best resource!

On a final note, stay tuned for a new collaboration in development with Colorado Medical Society and CPHP – a Peer Consulting Program to create even more ready access for our Colorado medical providers to access support they need and deserve!

1. Hu YY, Fix ML, Hevelone ND, Lipsitz SR, Greenberg CC, Weissman JS, Shapiro J. Physicians' needs in coping with emotional stressors: the case for peer support. Arch Surg. 2012 Mar;147(3):212-7. doi: 10.1001/archsurg.2011.312. Epub 2011 Nov 21. PMID: 22106247; PMCID: PMC3309062.