

How chief wellness officers can define mission, develop strategy

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Amid a culture that is contributing to burnout and a loss of a sense of joy in medicine, a chief wellness officer (CWO) can help an organization systematically improve the well-being of physicians and other health professionals.

After thoughtfully assembling a team and identifying existing wellness programs in an organization, it is essential that the CWO lead an effort to define the team's mission and develop a strategy to achieve it. An AMA STEPS Forward™ toolkit helps health systems and organizations do just that and more.

Defining the mission and developing a strategy to achieve it is the fifth step of the “Chief Wellness Officer Road Map” toolkit that outlines a nine-step approach that CWOs can follow to implement a leadership strategy for professional well-being.

A mission typically is an aspirational statement that “envisions an ideal future state or articulates the purpose behind the program's creation,” the toolkit explains. The strategy, meanwhile, needs to be a specific plan. That plan should focus on a few critical thematic focus areas that allow the CWO, the team and the organization to accomplish the mission.

“The strategy must be adapted for each organization based on the unique opportunities, priorities, gaps and resources of that organization. While the mission for your center or program can typically be developed in a single session or over a few days, developing a cogent strategy typically takes several months and requires extensive input and review from stakeholders both inside and outside the center,” the toolkit advises.

How to develop a strategy

When developing a strategy, the toolkit outlines some things that CWO's should do. For example, specify a limited number of long-term focus areas—about three to five—and plan to only make minimal changes to the strategy from year-to-year, even if the tactics to advance a dimension of the strategy change.

Additionally, keep in mind—and stress to others on the team who likely have limited experience with strategic thinking and planning—that a strategy is not a collection of tactics or a conceptual framework. If the CWO and team members deploy tactics without considering a plan's core dimensions, the organization likely won't make progress toward accomplishing their mission because the effort is typically fragmented and ineffective even if the tactics themselves are proven effective approaches.

It is also important to avoid simply adopting another organization's strategy. And remember that a conceptual framework is not the same as a strategy. That's because a conceptual framework, by design, is a holistic overview intended to provide a comprehensive view of the variables contributing to the challenge or opportunities.

Clearly define a strategy

Creating a strategic plan isn't only about determining what the team will do, though. It's also about deliberately deciding what it will not do.

“A CWO and team could easily become distracted if they attempted to single-handedly address every aspect of practice efficiency and organizational culture throughout the institution,” said Christine Sinsky, MD, vice president of professional satisfaction at the AMA, who coauthored the toolkit. “This could lead to frustration and cynicism.”

Learn more about how to lay the groundwork at your organization with the “Establishing a Chief Wellness Officer Position” toolkit.

Committed to making physician burnout a thing of the past, the AMA has studied, and is currently addressing issues causing and fueling physician burnout—including time constraints, technology and regulations—to better understand and reduce the challenges physicians face. By focusing on factors causing burnout at the system-level, the AMA assesses an organization's well-being and offers guidance and targeted solutions to support physician well-being and satisfaction.

AMA STEPS Forward open-access toolkits offer innovative strategies that allow physicians and their staff to thrive in the new health care environment. These courses can help you prevent physician burnout, create the organizational foundation for joy in medicine and improve practice efficiency.