

# Pilot program offers plan for improving mental health care for resident physicians

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A pilot program to offer mental health services offered resident physicians at the University of Colorado School of Medicine provides a model for confidential and affordable help, according to an article published today by the journal *Academic Medicine*.

For the 2017-2018 class, 80 resident physicians in the internal medicine and in [internal medicine](#) -pediatrics programs were enrolled in a mental health program that provided scheduled appointments at the campus mental health center. Residents were allowed to opt-out of the appointments. The cost of the appointments was covered by the residency programs, not charged to residents. Programs received de-identified invoices so that residents who participated could receive care confidentially.

"Developing mental health programs for residents can be challenging, as previous research has revealed that lack of time, concerns about confidentiality, concerns about stigma, and cost are significant barriers to residents seeking [mental health care](#)," the authors write.

Concerns about mental health for [health care workers](#), and resident physicians in particular, have been elevated in recent years as studies have identified the prevalence of burnout and depression. The authors explain that unaddressed mental health concerns among resident physicians can have a direct impact on patient care.

Of the 80 resident physicians who were automatically enrolled for [mental health services](#) in the [pilot program](#), 23 attended the scheduled appointments, 12 were no-shows, and 45 opted out. Forty-one of the 80 resident physicians responded to an anonymous post-appointment survey. Among the survey respondents were 16 who attended their mental health appointments. Survey respondents, even those who opted out, were mostly appreciative of the program.

While the number of residents participating in the study is relatively small, the authors write that the "[mental health](#) program positively influenced the well-being of residents by demonstrating that the residency program was 'walking the walk' and not simply 'talking the talk' with regard to wellness."

**More information:** Major, Ajay MD et al, Removing Barriers: A Confidential Opt-Out Mental Health Pilot Program for Internal Medicine Interns, *Academic Medicine*: February 2, 2021 - Volume Publish Ahead of Print - Issue [DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000003965](#)

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