

The Amazing Way This Hospital Is Fighting Physician Burnout

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Hospitals have procedures and alerts in place to deal with practically anything that could possibly go wrong: "Code Red" for fire, "code blue" for medical emergencies, and "code white" for behavioral disturbances, to name a few. But the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio has introduced a new alert, "Code Lavender," for a more unlikely and much more common threat: stress and burnout.

Code Lavender -- which has also been employed at [North Hawaii Community Hospital](#) in Waimea -- is a "holistic care rapid response" serving patients and physicians in need of intensive emotional or spiritual support, according to Amy Greene, director of spiritual care at Cleveland Clinic.

"It was an idea to indicate that we were going to respond as quickly as possible to a need for intensive emotional and spiritual support," Greene tells The Huffington Post. "We thought originally that it would be for patients and their family members, but as it turned out, we started doing them mostly for staff."

The Clinic is consistently [ranked among the best hospitals in the world](#), and as such, it houses some of the sickest patients, including both children and adults, in the country and beyond.

The Code Lavender program, which has been in place since 2008, aims to support nurses and physicians during emotionally troubling or exhausting times, often after experiencing the death of one or several patients.

"[Cleveland Clinic] caregivers are used to seeing really difficult cases, but even they are going to buckle when they get hit two or three times in one day," Greene says. "Code Lavender is a holistic team approach to going up and saying, 'Hey, we've got your back.'"

Within 30 minutes of a call, the Clinic's team of holistic nurses arrives at the unit in need to provide Reiki and massage, healthy snacks and water, and lavender arm bands to remind the nurse or physician to take it easy for the rest of the day.

“I love the whole concept of Code Lavender. It makes us feel appreciated and valued,” [one nurse wrote in a Cleveland Clinic survey](#), while another noted, “It is helpful because it’s nice to get your stress out. It’s also good to know that our workplace feels our pain and is willing to be there for us.”

The Healing Services Team employs holistic methods that include spiritual support, counseling and therapeutic massage. Bringing together conventional medicine and alternative remedies, the Clinic also offers employees yoga classes, weight loss programs and mindfulness training.

The Cleveland Clinic is a one of a growing number of health care facilities integrating holistic healing into their services. A [2011 American Hospital Association report](#) found that 42 percent of surveyed hospitals offer one or more Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) therapies -- including acupuncture, homeotherapy and herbal medicine -- increasing from 37 percent in 2007, and 26 percent in 2005.

The Code Lavender program is just one of a growing number being created to address burnout among physicians and health care providers. One [2012 national study](#) found that nearly half of all physicians experience burnout, more than any other type of U.S. workers. Emergency care, critical care, and family medicine workers experience the highest rates of burnout among health care providers.

Recent research has found that mindfulness training may be effective in not only reducing burnout, but also in boosting compassion among physicians. [University of Virginia research](#) from 2012 also found that mindfulness-based stress reduction courses to significantly improve burnout and well-being scores for various types of healthcare providers. And according to a [small, recent study](#) published in the Annals of Family Medicine, mindfulness training programs help physicians to feel better connected to their patients.

"[Compassion-based care] does go against an old style of medicine where it was just, 'Go go go, stay tough, don't be impacted by it, keep moving,'" says Greene. "We're seeing that this is long-term not sustainable. Doctors and nurses are human beings."