

Background: Female physician trainees are disproportionately affected by burnout compared to their male counterparts. Growing evidence suggests that negative perceptions of physician culture contribute to burnout. One promising early intervention for perception of work culture is professional coaching (“coaching”). We created a coaching program for residents with an aim to decrease burnout. Here, we describe results from a pilot of our novel online, group coaching program: Better Together Physician Coaching (Better Together).

Methods: This is a prospective, randomized control trial of a professional coaching intervention. One hundred and one female-identifying resident physicians in Graduate Medical Education at a large academic institution voluntarily enrolled in a 6-month, multi-modal, web-based group coaching program developed and facilitated by trained life coaches and physicians (TF and AM). All participants completed a pre-survey using validated indices to measure burnout (primary outcome) and self-compassion, moral injury and imposter syndrome (secondary outcomes). They were then randomized into either the intervention arm (6 months of coaching) or the control group (no coaching) from January-June of 2021. A post-survey mirroring the pre-survey was distributed at 6 months, and statistical analysis was performed on an intent-to-treat basis.

Results: Among the 101 residents, 6 months of professional coaching decreased emotional exhaustion in the intervention group by a mean of 3.26 points compared to an increase of 1.07 points in the control group by the end of the study ($p=0.03$). The intervention group experienced a significant reduction in imposter syndrome imposter syndrome compared to controls (-1.16 vs +0.11; $p=0.002$). Self-compassion increased in the intervention group by a mean of 5.55 points compared to a reduction of 1.32 points in the control group ($p<0.001$). No statistically significant differences in depersonalization, professional accomplishment or moral injury were observed.

Conclusions:

Professional coaching may be an effective strategy to reduce emotional exhaustion and imposter phenomenon, while increasing self-compassion amongst female physician trainees.