

Background: Physician trainees, especially those who identify as female, are disproportionately affected by burnout compared to their non-physician age-matched peers. Physicians experience tremendous clinical growth in training, however little time is dedicated to metacognition (“thinking about your thinking” and reflecting on your emotional state nonjudgmentally), which is a necessary tool for processing experiences, forming professional identities, and creating individualized definitions of values and success. A 6-month, web-based group coaching program, Better Together Physician Coaching (“Better Together”), was developed and facilitated by trained life coaches and physicians (TF and AM) to decrease burnout. Here, we aim to understand the participant experiences with the Better Together program.

Methods: The Better Together intervention was a self-paced, asynchronous coaching program with multiple domains including live coaching calls, unlimited written coaching, and weekly self-study webinars and worksheets. Seventeen semi-structured interviews of participants who had completed 6 months of the Better Together coaching program were conducted in June of 2021. Both inductive and deductive methods were used in collecting and analyzing the data. Rapid domain analysis was used to analyze the data as it was collected.

Results: Three major themes emerged from the data: 1) Trainees benefitted from practicing metacognition used in coaching specifically around the sub-themes of burnout, self-compassion, imposter syndrome, and managing interpersonal relationships, 2) The sense of community and normalized experiences created among the coaching participants built rapport, trust, and a sense of belonging, and 3) Participants enjoyed the multiple modalities available for coaching. These options made the experience customizable to individual schedules, needs, personalities, and learning styles.

Conclusion: Participants found the Better Together coaching program contributed to improved wellbeing by using metacognition as a coping tool, and also through the vulnerable shared experiences they navigated together which combated isolation and burnout.