

Objective: To quantify the prevalence of burnout in our surgical residency program and to assess the impact of a weekly wellness program for surgical residents through validated tools measuring mindfulness, self-compassion, flourishing, and burnout. Our hypothesis was that participants with more frequent attendance would: 1) be more mindful and self-compassionate and 2) experience less burnout and more flourishing.

Design: An optional one-hour weekly breakfast conference was facilitated by a senior surgical faculty member with the time protected from all clinical duties. Following a guided meditation, participants were given time for reflection and dialogue about their training experiences or led in a wellness exercise. TRANCE (tolerance, respect, anonymity, non-retaliation, compassion, egalitarianism) principles were utilized to create a safe and open environment. Residents were surveyed at the end of the study period, which was from March 2017 through June 2018.

Setting: The conference and data analysis was conducted at Denver Health Medical Center, affiliated with the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

Participants: This study analyzed survey responses from 85 surgical residents.

Results: Following the wellness program, when answering the two-question Maslach Burnout Inventory, 35.7% of residents reported feeling burned out by their work once a week or more, and 29.7% reported feeling more callous toward people once a week or more. After multivariate analysis, the only independent predictors of increased burnout were “not being married or in a committed relationship”, lower positive affect, and higher negative affect. Qualitative feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and residents expressed gratitude for the conference, the opportunity for self-reflection, and open dialogue with attendings and colleagues.

Conclusions: The prevalence of burnout is high among surgical residents. Allowing time to practice a mindfulness meditation while providing space for residents to share their experiences may be protective, and efforts should be made to reduce barriers to participation.

Key Words: General Surgery, Burnout, Graduate Medical Education, Quality of Life, Resident Education

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