

Research Assessment #3

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Subject: Why “Happy” Doctors Die by Suicide

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Assessment: Physician Suicide

One of the many perks of having a mentor as great as Ellie are the academic journals and medical articles that she has access to and has been kind enough to share with me. Some days, I'll walk into her office and she'll hand me an article she read that she wanted me to also read. I have always been grateful for the learning materials Ellie as shared with me but I am especially grateful for this article.

When I first read the title of the article, I was extremely shocked. But, the more I thought about “why happy doctors die by suicide”, the more I realized that it should've been a concept I already knew. Across the world, it is known that oftentimes, the happiest people that we know are the least happy on the inside. I had never thought to apply that same concept to the field of medicine, however. It's quite the juxtaposition: those that spend their lives helping others cannot help themselves. It's also quite disconcerting to know that this is not more widely known. As a student looking into medicine, I hadn't heard about this epidemic until now so I wonder how many other students are kept sheltered from this devastating truth.

Surgeons are among the medical fields with the highest number of suicides, behind anesthesiologists. These high-stakes field obviously take tolls on people, but if the consequences of pursuing such a sophisticated career include being driven to the point of insanity or suicide, then it is past time to revolutionize the way physicians are treated in the medical world. It is inevitable that medical errors will occur because in many cases, the human body can act in unpredictable ways. However, the shame and self-loathing that physicians burden themselves with afterwards is inevitable. Dr. Wible writes, “Medical institutions employ words like ‘burnout’ and ‘resilience’ to blame and shame doctors while deflecting their own accountability for inhumane working conditions in failing health systems.” As the medical world ignores rampant mental health issues among some of its top performing employees, the suicide rate will continue to rise and remain unsolved as more and more physicians are driven to the point of no return.

Another surprising fact that Dr. Wilde mentioned was the turn around rate for doctors from when they decided to kill themselves to when they decided to take action. According to her research, the answer was 3 to 5 minutes. The impulsivity surrounding such a massive decision adds to the evidence that the mental state of many physicians needs to be addressed. For anybody, working 80+ hour weeks and constantly being

held responsible for other people's lives will affect their lifestyle and the way that they view themselves. It is a necessity that there is more care taken with the mental state of physicians because in addition to hurting those who are close to the physician personally, the patients that are left without their doctor are a hazard as well.

As I go out into the professional world and possibly pursue a career in the medical field, this concept of physician suicide will always be something in the forefront of my mind.