

# Dean's Task Force on the Learning Environment: Enhancing Well-Being and Changing Culture RECOMMENDATION REPORT

## Institutional Culture

In order to enhance well-being across Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (ISMMS) there needs to be a top-down communication strategy from the Dean that explicitly recognizes, supports, and values well-being programs and related faculty efforts. Over time our culture needs to more accurately reflect the importance of these activities, whether they are related to self-care or to sustaining an academic environment that is genuinely collegial, collaborative, inclusive, and centered on work-life balance. The Dean must develop mechanisms for incentivizing Chairs, Institute Directors, and the leadership of the Undergraduate Medical Education program, the Graduate Medical Education programs, and the Graduate School to deliver on establishing such a learning environment, including annual progress reports that are linked to mission-based budgeting and leadership salary bonuses.

Among the most critical components of this top-down culture is the need to publicize and reinforce the importance of demonstrating respect towards patients, colleagues, staff and trainees, putting in place mechanisms for rewarding this behavior when it is evident, and anonymously reporting it when it is not, including steps for remediation or discipline.

## Centralized well-being resource

Create an entity ("Mount Sinai Life" or "Center for Learning and Development") that is tasked with unifying the planning, development, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance of all well-being initiatives in a single entity, ideally at a central location.

The Center will be run by a dean level recruit who will report directly to the education leadership. This leader will have a budget to support faculty and personnel who as a team will oversee trainee well-being, mental health, and academic support activities for all students, housestaff, and postdoctoral fellows, and advocate for resources to alleviate demands on over-burdened trainees.

The Center will have dedicated space that will allow the school to co-locate all mental health and well-being resources, and if possible Student Health. Activities will include mindfulness, meditation, resilience training (positive psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy {CBT}, etc.), opportunities for reflection, stress management, and workshops on topics such as healthy eating, proper sleep hygiene, physical fitness, and conflict resolution, as well as opportunities for leadership to openly discuss personal challenges that they have overcome throughout their life or career (e.g. Keeping It Real series).

The Center staff will work closely with the Office of Alumni Affairs, the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, the Graduate School's Office of Career Services and Strategy, and the offices of Student Affairs for the Graduate School and Medical Education, the GME Office and Wellness Subcommittee of the GMEC, the Center for Multicultural and Community Affairs, and the Office for Diversity and Inclusion, and will support the

effort to enhance faculty, peer-to-peer and near-peer mentorship and career counseling across all constituency groups.

The leader of this Center will participate in school-wide diversity councils and committees (e.g. Faculty Diversity Council, GME Diversity Council, Diversity in Biomedical Research Council) to promote the inclusion of wellness and mental health considerations in all diversity efforts.

The Center will research and innovate best practices for enhancing well-being and resilience. The Center will also be charged with publicizing the emphasis on well-being throughout the institution, and being the leading edge of a shift in culture at ISMMS.

The Center will collect anonymous feedback through regular climate surveys and focus groups of students, trainees, faculty, and staff. This data will be used to benchmark measures of success, assess student/trainee well-being, continuously improve and enhance existing services, and inform the development of new services.

Metrics and outcomes to measure improved trainee/learner well-being (e.g. burnout, well-being indices, etc.) within and across programs will be reported to the Dean on an annual basis.

Ongoing activities, progress, and data from feedback will be shared on the Center website. This site will include:

- A directory of wellness activities
- A universal calendar of community-building and social events
- Links to school, departmental and multidisciplinary training area handbooks that address academic and career planning concerns specific to the unique cohorts within the Mount Sinai learner community
- Links to existing advisory and mentorship opportunities
- An anonymous Web forum visible to the whole school for reporting and discussing issues related to the well-being of learning community members, ranging from positive affirmations of thriving to incidents of racism, abuse, etc. The aim of this forum is to normalize discussion of well-being and enhance our sense of community.

### Universal Needs

- Enhance career guidance and mentorship resources: faculty development for mentors and PIs, mentorship awards, protected time and salary support for mentors (incorporate meaningful mentorship into mission-based budgeting and link it to quality measures)
- Enhance the recruitment, retention and promotion of a more diverse faculty (women, and those who are underrepresented in medicine and science), including recruitment to all leadership positions
- More formal near-peer and peer-to-peer mentorship programs
- Annual academic/social retreats for community building, reflection, networking, sharing scholarly work, both within and across learner cohorts
- Establish trainee/mentor and trainee/PI feedback mechanisms that are constructive, safe, and promote the growth of the mentor-mentee relationship
- Incorporate opportunities for reflection into the required curricula and training programs
- Offer regular protected time (e.g. Flextime) throughout training to pursue well-being activities, including health and mental health

- Protected time and salary support for each Department and Institute to designate a Wellness Champion who will implement and oversee activities in their area
- More comprehensive support for childcare and parental leave
- Enhance recruitment and retention of faculty of color
- Implement faculty and staff training in unconscious bias and racism
- Create spaces that allow for quiet study, refuge, and wellness activities
- Mental Health
  - Expand Mental Health services, including:
    - Careful review of an annual mental health evaluation (“opt out” policy)
    - Specific expertise in addiction, substance abuse, eating disorders, attention deficit
    - Specific populations (e.g., URiM, LGBTQ)
    - Couples counseling
    - Grief counseling
  - Establish how and when to deliver routine and expanded mental health services:
    - Support groups
    - Evidence-based psychotherapy (e.g., CBT, talk therapy)
    - Psycho-education (e.g. Suicide Education and Prevention Day)
    - Off-hour and walk-in services
    - Urgent / Emergency services
    - Reduce wait time
  - Right-size the number and complement of staffing for routine and expanded services:
    - Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers, and Support Staff for scheduling/clerical.
  - Improve the manner (primarily via a new website) in which routine and expanded services are communicated and accessed:
    - Description of available mental health services
    - List of internal providers and the ability to seamlessly request an appointment (via our internal scheduling system)
    - List of external providers with contact information and guidance on the referral process and insurance / payment information
    - Enhanced education that is integrated with wellness activities
    - Reiteration of confidentiality policy

### Specific group needs

#### Postdoctoral Fellows

- Establish a committee process parallel to PhD thesis committees that provides post docs with feedback, suggestions, and career guidance other than from their PI
- Enhance staffing for Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, Office of Career Services
- Awards and recognition for post docs (leadership; mentoring; teaching; entrepreneurship/IP/innovation; outreach to surrounding community; contribution to Mount Sinai)
- Establish and enforce clear & formal policies regarding trainee mistreatment, with committee process mirroring the medical student mistreatment committee
- Concerns about housing, lack of social space, inadequate support from the International Personnel Office

#### Residents/Fellows

- Establish committees that continually examine patient service size, work hours, attending supervision/accessibility, rotation length, etc. These committees should be empowered and funded

to pilot novel training strategies, including scheduling models that shift work intensity away from novice trainees, and increase supervision early in the academic year, within the confines and under the guidance of ACGME core requirements. Such committees should be composed of trainees, training program directors, Chief Residents, Nursing, high-level hospital administration, faculty well-being experts and members of the lay public. These committees can also serve as an open forum to discuss anonymous feedback on well-being and academic culture in order to address challenges and close the feedback loop

- Establish well-being initiatives within all training programs across the health system
- Service vs. Education - develop a transparent departmental metric, reported to the Dean annually, tied to departmental budget and Chair compensation
  - Will require more support staff – patient flow navigators, overnight teaching hospitalists, ED ancillary staff, etc.
- Mentorship – biostatistical support, departmental research registries

### Medical Students

- Change from normative to criterion-based clerkship grading
- Re-evaluate graduation honors and awards, including AOA
- Partner with clinical departments to pilot a pathway to residency that does not rely on USMLE board scores

### Graduate students

- Shift culture of Thesis Committee meetings from evaluative only to evaluative + supportive; fold in mechanisms for ongoing self-assessment and feedback
- Mandate travel allowance for at least one conference per year to present research for all year 2+ students