

The Well-Being Arc: Sustainability from Residency to Retirement





A Shared Commitment to a Sustainable Healthcare Future

The long-term health of our healthcare system hinges on sustainability – both for the individuals within it and the organizations that serve our communities. At VITAL WorkLife, we believe these two aspects are intrinsically linked.

We recognize the constant demands on your operations and the critical need to support your frontline clinicians. That's why our resources and programs are strategically designed to yield a strong return on investment through increased career longevity and reduced turnover, building a sustainable multi-generational workforce that positively impacts your bottom line through improved efficiency and reduced disruption.

At the same time, we never lose sight of the individual. By empowering clinicians, we foster a culture of resilience and proactively address burnout, leading to greater mental health, well-being, and sustained engagement – cultivating a healthier and more engaged individual and workforce.

The data is clear: even with progress,¹ U.S. physicians require ongoing support to combat burnout's root causes. The remarkable 96% of our members who credit Physician Peer Coaching with helping them remain in their roles, coupled with a 34% boost in well-being, demonstrates the profound impact of targeted interventions.²

Together, we share a commitment to a healthier, more sustainable future for physicians and the healthcare industry as we work together to expand access to these proven solutions. A future where your people and organization thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mitchell Best". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mitchell" and last name "Best" clearly legible.

MITCHELL BEST
Chief Executive Officer

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Executive Summary

“The Well-Being Arc: Sustainability from Residency to Retirement” white paper underscores the importance of supporting physicians’ personal and professional sustainability throughout their medical careers. From addressing mental health stigma and fostering well-being during residency to balancing career advancement and personal fulfillment mid-career, the Well-Being Arc highlights tailored solutions like peer coaching, work-life resources, and leadership development. For late-career physicians, it emphasizes legacy-building, adaptability and mentorship.

By introducing sustainable strategies at each stage and across generations – such as confidential peer support, clinician-focused well-being programs, and leadership consultations, this approach enhances resilience, reduces burnout, and improves career satisfaction and longevity. The result: physicians remain engaged and effective contributors to your healthcare organization while thriving in all dimensions of their lives.

01 **Optimizing Success in Residency**

The well-being of physicians is increasingly recognized as crucial for delivering quality care and ensuring a sustainable healthcare system. This section emphasizes the importance of early intervention during residency. By integrating well-being resources and principles into residency programs, and offering confidential peer support, healthcare organizations can decrease stigma, improve resident well-being, and cultivate a new generation of physicians who thrive in their careers.

02 **Mid-Career Growth & Development**

For physicians, the mid-career stage is crucial for long-term satisfaction and sustainability, yet many grapple with burnout, career development, and the transition to leadership roles. This section delves into strategies and support systems, including peer coaching, counseling, and leadership consultations, that empower physicians to address these challenges, enhance their well-being, and make choices that support a fulfilling and enduring career in medicine.

03 **Ensuring a Legacy**

Late-career physicians possess invaluable expertise, but face unique challenges such as adapting to evolving healthcare landscapes and navigating transitions like scaling down clinical work or pursuing new roles. This section explores how resources and support like peer coaching, can empower these physicians to maintain professional relevance, embrace legacy-building opportunities, and continue contributing meaningfully to medicine.

01 Optimizing Success in Residency

The future of medicine relies on embracing changes to provide essential resources and remove obstacles that impact physicians' well-being and autonomy, enabling them to deliver high-quality, cost-effective care. ACGME Residency Program requirements emphasize that psychological, emotional, and physical well-being are critical in the development of the competent, caring, and resilient physician. However, nearly 79% of medical residents³ claim that there still is stigma surrounding mental health and seeking mental health care among physicians exposing one of the most critical barriers to seeking help.

Long-time VITAL WorkLife Physician Peer Coach, Robert Leschke, MD, shares “the challenge during residency is to create an identity as a competent physician who is prepared to practice independently. Residents who are struggling to meet basic needs of sleep, nutrition, physical health, relational connection, and career safety, have a difficult time effectively managing any negative emotion that tends to show up during this time.”

“If we don't help him now, this is going to taint his entire future in medicine – as an employee, as a physician.

—comment from a CMO about a burned-out resident

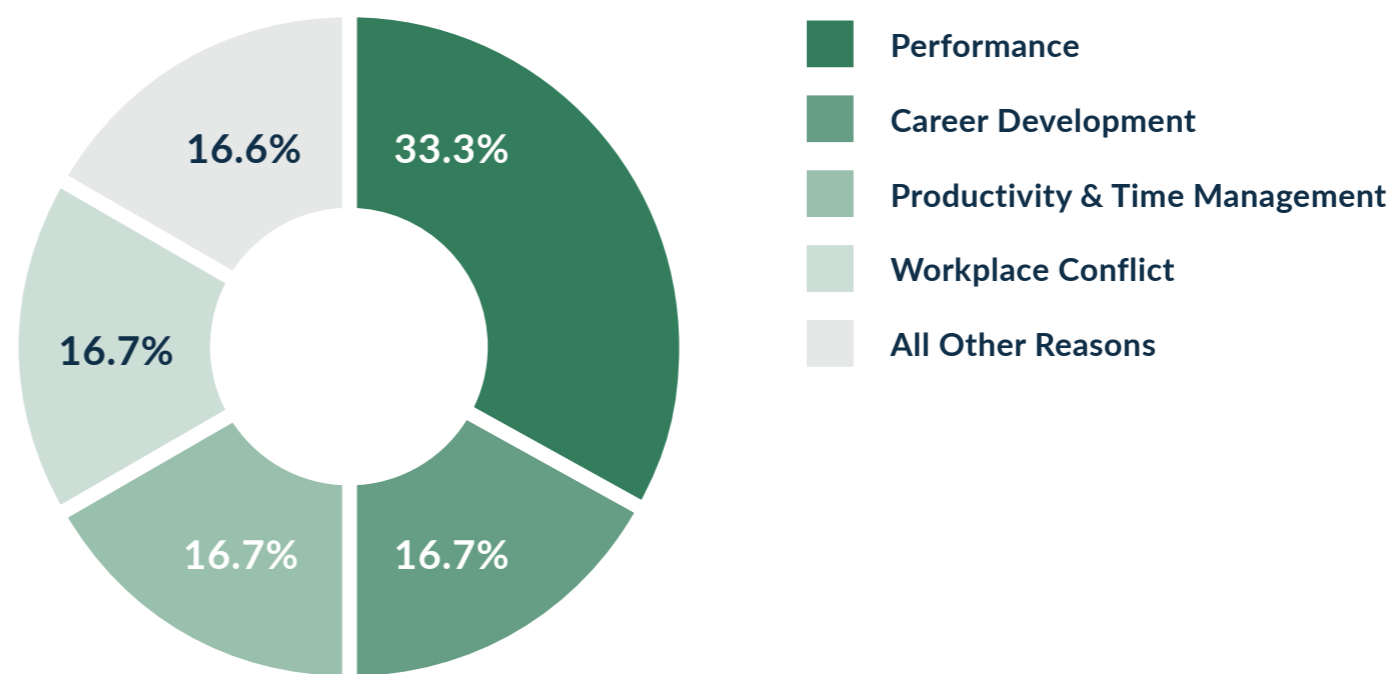
Career Goals & Personal Well-Being

Physicians for generations accepted being at the mercy of their pagers. Now, many are questioning medicine's workaholic culture.⁴ While residents are career-minded, they will also adjust career goals to maximize personal well-being, including their mental and emotional health and work-life balance. Early career physicians want a joyful career and are seeking organizations that are flexible, responsive and openly support physician well-being.

Organizations that don't prioritize comprehensive well-being and burnout strategies and programs will face an endless cycle of physician turnover and recruiting costs, while the quality of patient care and satisfaction scores drop.

50%+ of residents who participated in VITAL WorkLife peer coaching addressed concerns in professional and emotional well-being dimensions.²

Top Primary Reasons for Residents Seeking Help²



01 Optimizing Success in Residency

Introducing well-being skill development in the early stages of a physician's career, especially during residency, can have a life-long positive impact and extend career longevity and satisfaction. VITAL WorkLife integrates well-being resources and principles into residents' onboarding, through its Resident Well-Being Check-Ins, a confidential space for residents to learn about burnout, available resources, and discuss well-being issues.

This targeted approach decreases the stigma around engaging in mental health support, develops effective well-being habits, and establishes coping mechanisms for a physician's career path. Along with check-in programming, coaching and counseling can help develop well-being skills in physicians, nurture joy in their practice and sustain optimal work and life balance.

More than half of the residents who participated in VITAL WorkLife peer coaching addressed concerns in their Professional and Emotional Well-Being dimensions to find meaning and fulfillment in their work, navigate relationships with colleagues, and learn and practice stress management skills to build resilience.



Residents reported a 14% improvement in their well-being after engaging with their peer coach.²

“While some organizations offer internal wellness programs, they lack confidentiality and the unique benefits of a peer-based approach. **Having access to confidential peer coaching, independent of the organization, can make a huge difference in success.** Organizations should consider a robust program of peer coaching to help residents sustain their well-being as opposed to just offering support reactively when there are perceived struggles with well-being.

—Robert Leschke, MD
VITAL WorkLife Physician Peer Coach

 Perspectives

Bonus Content: Residents & Young Doctors: Burnout and Suicide Risk

[Read the article >>](#)

02 Mid-Career Growth & Development

As any professional moves into their mid-career phase, they may face burnout due to increased responsibilities, workplace politics, and feelings of stagnation. Balancing work with personal life becomes more complex, and those transitioning to leadership roles must develop new skills to manage teams effectively. For physicians in mid-career, they often find themselves at a professional crossroads, balancing clinical practice, career advancement, and personal fulfillment. Their plates are full of professional duties and career growth opportunities, which can be in direct conflict with their workload.

This can lead to a feeling of imbalance and personal conflict in finding ways to achieve an effective sustainable pathway representing both their professional and personal life. Young doctors want work-life balance to ensure time for children and family.

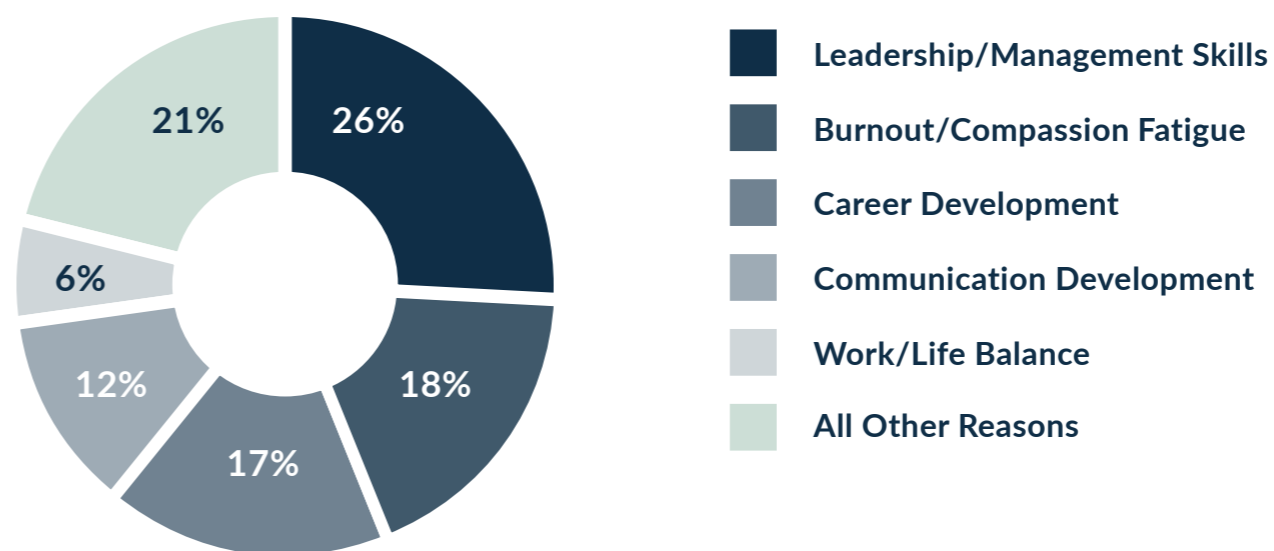
Of physicians who engaged in VITAL WorkLife peer coaching, 46% explored career development, often within the context of navigating burnout², identifying personal and professional boundaries and handling compassion fatigue. Several randomized trials⁵ have demonstrated that working with an experienced peer coach within one's specialty helps physicians reflect on why they entered medicine and how to align their passion for medicine with the realistic need for social/familial connection and well-being.

“The usual early, mid and late careers can each be decades long, and not tied to age alone, but to years in practice. This is especially variable in the early phase where nontraditional medical school and residency applicants can be in training alongside traditional applicants. The mid-career phase I think of is more related to the increasing expertise in their clinical field, and the point where doctors pivot toward dreams and desires.

—Sharon Kiely, MD, MPM, FACP
Peer Coach, VITAL WorkLife
Former Vice President & Chief Wellness Officer, Hartford HealthCare

50% of physicians with 5-20 years experience who participated in VITAL WorkLife peer coaching addressed concerns in professional and emotional well-being dimensions.²

Physicians with 5-20 Years Experience²



Physician Peer Coaching Results

96% of our peer coaching participants said it made them more likely for them to stay in their role

02

Mid-Career Growth
& Development

It is also important to note at the career mid-point; physicians frequently move into leadership roles. VITAL WorkLife Leadership Consultations, guided by experienced leaders in Chief Medical Officer or Chief Well-Being Officer roles, allow new physician leaders to explore the challenges that come with a senior position. As one physician shared, **“I needed to improve my personal leadership, how to set up initiatives for success and get buy in, as well as needing to practice effective and clear communication techniques and guidance around change management for this department.”** This department chair at a 400+ bed hospital in the Midwest used a Leadership Consultation to discuss their role as a physician and chair and the dynamics of that and how to manage the emotions of their 40+ providers in the wake of significant change.



Video Testimonial

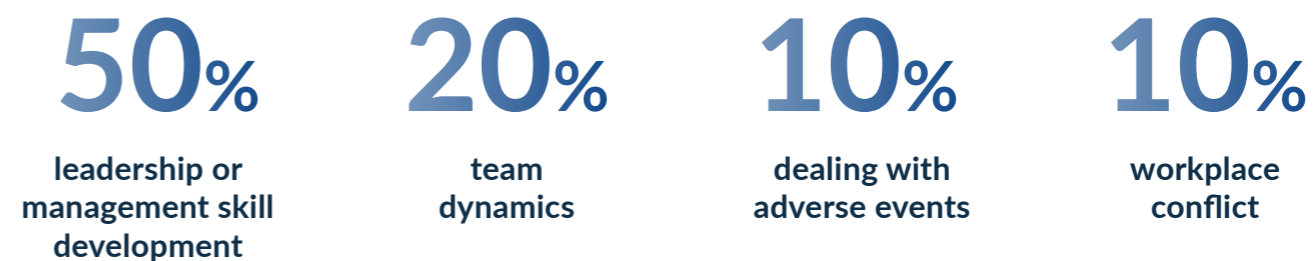
Bonus Content: “I never talked to anybody in my entire life.” Until Now.

Tim Woods, MD, General Surgery & Bariatric Surgery at Cox Health

[See the impact >>](#)

Leadership Needs in this Phase²

Reasons self-reported for Leadership Consultations for physicians with 5-20 years of experience.



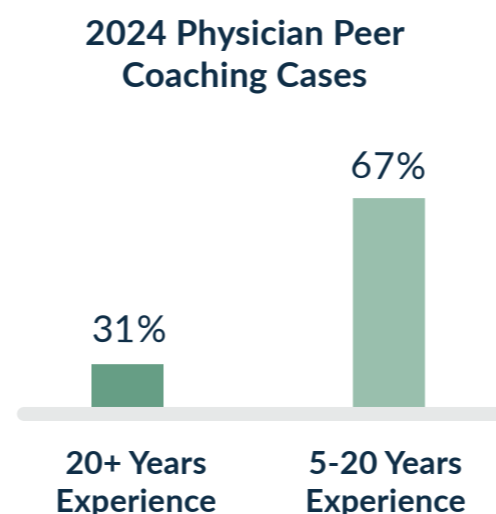
03 Ensuring a Legacy

Physicians now in established careers bring a wealth of expertise and knowledge that often set them apart as mentors, leaders, and experts. Despite their years of experiences, late-career physicians face unique challenges. Advances in technology and changes in care delivery and administrative tasks require continuous learning to stay current. This can be particularly demanding for those who are used to providing care based on early career training.

Additionally, the physical and emotional demands of practicing medicine may take a toll, leading some to transition to part-time roles or positions focused on administration, education, or consulting. Professional organizations and healthcare systems can provide resources to support these transitions, ensuring that their skills remain valuable to the medical community even as their direct clinical workload decreases.

Coaching Differences

Physicians from VITAL WorkLife engagement data, compared to younger counterparts.²



Intentionality in Coaching

Sarah Samaan, MD, Physician Peer Coach for VITAL WorkLife, shares,

“When physicians are in the process of retirement or scaling down, they often feel as if they are in uncharted waters. Especially for more senior physicians who may have worked through several different phases of change in healthcare, there may not be a role model or an established path to prepare the way.”

This is where intentional conversations during coaching with a peer who has successfully navigated the elements of the later career phase can be so valuable.



Perspectives

Bonus Content: Rethinking Physician Career Longevity in Healthcare

[Read the article >>](#)

Physicians with 20+ Years Experience²

10%
of cases were related to retirement

100%
of our peer coaching participants would recommend it to others

03 Ensuring a Legacy

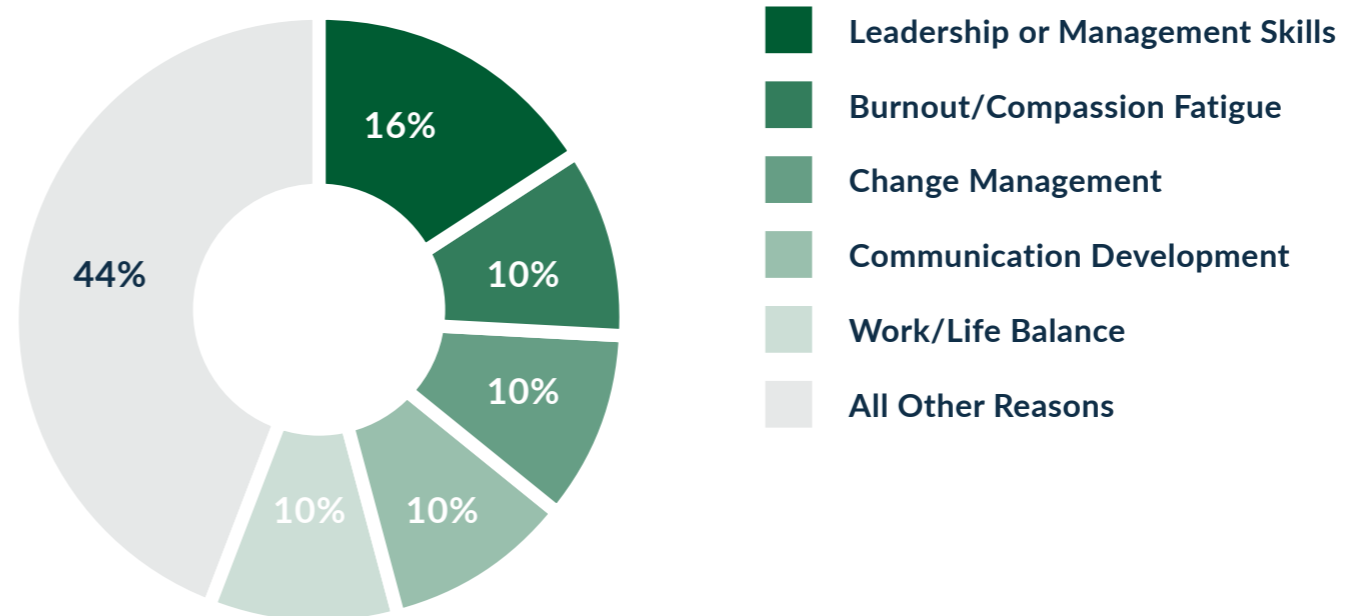
For many, this career phase is also an opportunity for reflection and legacy-building. Healthcare administrators assume most physicians will fully retire, but many continue working in some capacity. Nearly 40% of administrators named “full retirement” as a top retirement transition method at their organization, but just 17% of physicians fully retire.⁶

Physicians may choose to focus on projects they are passionate about, such as health initiatives, writing, or advancing policy changes to improve healthcare delivery. They often find fulfillment in sharing their wisdom, leaving a lasting impact on their institutions and the broader field of medicine. By striking a balance between maintaining professional relevance and embracing new roles, late-career physicians continue to be an integral part of the healthcare landscape.



Professional and emotional well-being combined for around 50% of total cases for this career group.²

Top Reasons for Seeking Help²



Leading for a Sustainable Future: Addressing Generational Well-Being Expectations in Healthcare

Healthcare leaders can no longer afford a one-size-fits-all approach for clinician well-being, when considering the career arc from residency to retirement. The evolving landscape of healthcare demands more than just strategic thinking; it requires a profound understanding of physicians' career lifecycle and shifting generational expectations, particularly concerning mental health, well-being, and career fulfillment.

Each generation brings a distinct set of values to the workplace. Gen Z's strong emphasis on flexibility, technology integration, and mental health, alongside Millennials' desire for autonomy and work-life balance, are reshaping the talent pool as they enter medical school or shoulder family and patient care responsibilities. Gen X and Baby Boomers, as the sandwich generations, face the financial and emotional burden of caring for both children and aging parents, impacting their own well-being. While technology offers immense potential, its unmanaged implementation risks exacerbating burnout, a critical concern across all generations.

The time is now to actively listen to and address these diverse needs across multiple generations with varying workplace and well-being expectations.

- Embracing flexible work models that support work-life balance
- Investing in robust mental health and well-being programs
- Prioritizing continuous learning and leadership development
- Fostering a culture of trust and autonomy

These are not merely perks — they are strategic imperatives for attracting, retaining, and empowering a thriving workforce. While navigating the complexities of a multi-generational physician workforce presents unique challenges, the power of peer coaching and support offers a consistent solution. Ranked as the most rewarding support and the top contributor to retention and career satisfaction across four generations, peer coaching is a critical strategy for fostering well-being and lasting organizational impact.

Today's healthcare leaders must be agile and empathetic, recognizing that a healthy, engaged workforce is the bedrock of exceptional patient care and organizational success. The future belongs to those who proactively evolve their organizations to meet these changing expectations, building resilient teams ready to navigate the complexities ahead. The moment to adapt, to innovate, and to truly prioritize the holistic well-being of every generation within your workforce is not tomorrow, but today. The time to act is now.



About VITAL WorkLife

VITAL WorkLife partners with healthcare organizations to measurably improve the mental health and well-being of their workforce. With an exclusive healthcare focus – and an experienced network of physician peer coaches and behavioral health consultants – VITAL WorkLife matches clinicians and caregivers with tailored solutions to enhance well-being, career longevity, and satisfaction.

Contact Us

To learn more about how to foster a culture of well-being at your organization, visit VITALWorkLife.com or call 877.731.3949.



Testimonials

Bonus Content: Explore the many positive comments from members, clients, brokers, peer coaches, and counselors who have worked with VITAL WorkLife.

[Read the reviews >>](#)



Case Studies

Bonus Content: Discover how VITAL WorkLife supports physician well-being – and drives organizational productivity and results.

[Explore client success >>](#)

Sources

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