



## **NDMA 2023 Policy Forum**

**October 6, 2023**

### **Policy No. 3**

**Submitted By:** NDMA Council

**Subject:** Physician Retention

**Summary:**

Physician retention is becoming a problem in North Dakota. Physician retention is related to the high physician burnout, increasing administrative burdens, and the high student loan debt that is documented in the United States.

**Relevant Information:**

- Health care worker shortages, especially in rural and otherwise underserved areas of the country, have reached critical and unsustainable levels, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
- Surveys indicate that a great clinician resignation lies ahead. As reported in JAMA Network, a survey conducted by Green Center co-director Rebeca S. Etz, shares that a quarter of clinicians said they planned to leave primary care within 3 years. Another study funded by the American Medical Association, Coping With COVID, predicts a more widespread clinician exodus: in the pandemic's first year, 23.8% of the more than 9000 physicians from various disciplines planned to exit practice.
- Before the coronavirus pandemic, physician burnout was a national concern, and the pandemic has driven physician burnout to crisis proportions. The Association of American Medical Colleges [projects](#) there will be a shortage of physicians between 37,800 and 124,000 clinicians by 2034.
- According to research by the American Medical Association, Mayo Clinic and Stanford Medicine, after declining for six years, the burnout rate among physicians began to spike with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of 2021, some 21 months later, the physician

burnout rate rose to an unprecedented high. The study, published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings, found that the prevalence of burnout among U.S. physicians was 62.8% in 2021, compared with 38.2% in 2020, 43.9% in 2017, 54.4% in 2014 and 45.5% in 2011. The result is that one in five physicians intends to leave their current practice within two years.

- Physicians also face an increasingly dangerous workplace. A clinical workplace now adjudged to be the most unsafe workplace in all the U.S. with more than 75 percent of all assaults now occurring in healthcare and with healthcare workers now facing a five times greater likelihood of being assaulted, while at work, than in any other workplace.

<https://www.beckersasc.com/asc-news/the-final-straw-will-declining-physician-pay-be-the-disruptor-that-breaks-the-camels-back.html>

- An increasingly chaotic workplace highlighted by management-driven (profit-motivated) increasingly unsafe per-hour patient volumes, worsening impossible-to-safely-complete daily workloads, increasing prior authorization denials and persistent drug shortages that further worsen patient outcomes. Id.
- A physician-in-training period of a minimum of eight to 12 years, sometimes longer, where little if any income is earned, but over \$250,000 to \$500,000 of training debt is accrued. Thus, young physicians face an eight- to 12-plus-year career delay before entering into an earning marketplace and are already saddled with up to a half million dollars in debt. Id.

**Proposed Action:**

NDMA should create a stakeholder group, including but not limited to the chief medical officers of the state's hospitals, the specialty societies in the state and the UNDSMHS to closely study physician retention to identify areas that need change in North Dakota and develop recommendations that may be considered by the NDMA Council.

*Adopted November 28, 2023*

*Erica Hofland, MD*

*Policy Forum Chair*