

Initial Evaluation of a Wellness Game

Bing G. Parkinson, PGY-3 MD HCA, Bruce St. Amour, DO, MS, BSN, FCOEP



Background

Physician wellness has recently been a topic of significant national interest.¹⁻⁸ The term “wellness” has many definitions, and was best defined by Around et al. ¹ as “one’s personal recipe for thriving and not just surviving.” Wellness refers to interconnected dimensions of physical, mental, and social well-being that extend beyond the absence of illness.

Wellness has traditionally been measured in the negative sense by assessing rates of burnout, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization. It is known that physician burnout is at its highest point during residency^{1, 4, 5} and burnout is linked to many negative outcomes including: substance abuse and suicidal ideation by the physician; lower quality of patient care; increased patient recovery times; reduced physician productivity; and a doubled risk of medical error.⁹

Most researchers have focused on organizational-level interventions such as corporate wellness or resilience training to reduce burnout, although individual level interventions such as meditation and mindfulness have shown some promise as a means to help reduce burnout.² However there is still room for significant improvement and innovation in the development of wellness resources.

Working long hours in residency can lead to loneliness and this social isolation, combined with loss of friends and support systems brought on by moving to a new environment, may have a significant impact on wellness with increased burnout.⁷ People are often hesitant to develop intimate connections and disclose personal details, and thus begin the bonding process with strangers.

Interpersonal connections and engagement is necessary to thrive in residency. The game “Well...For Me” means to address an avenue to help residents build healthy connections in a manner that promotes bonding with fellow residents.

Methods

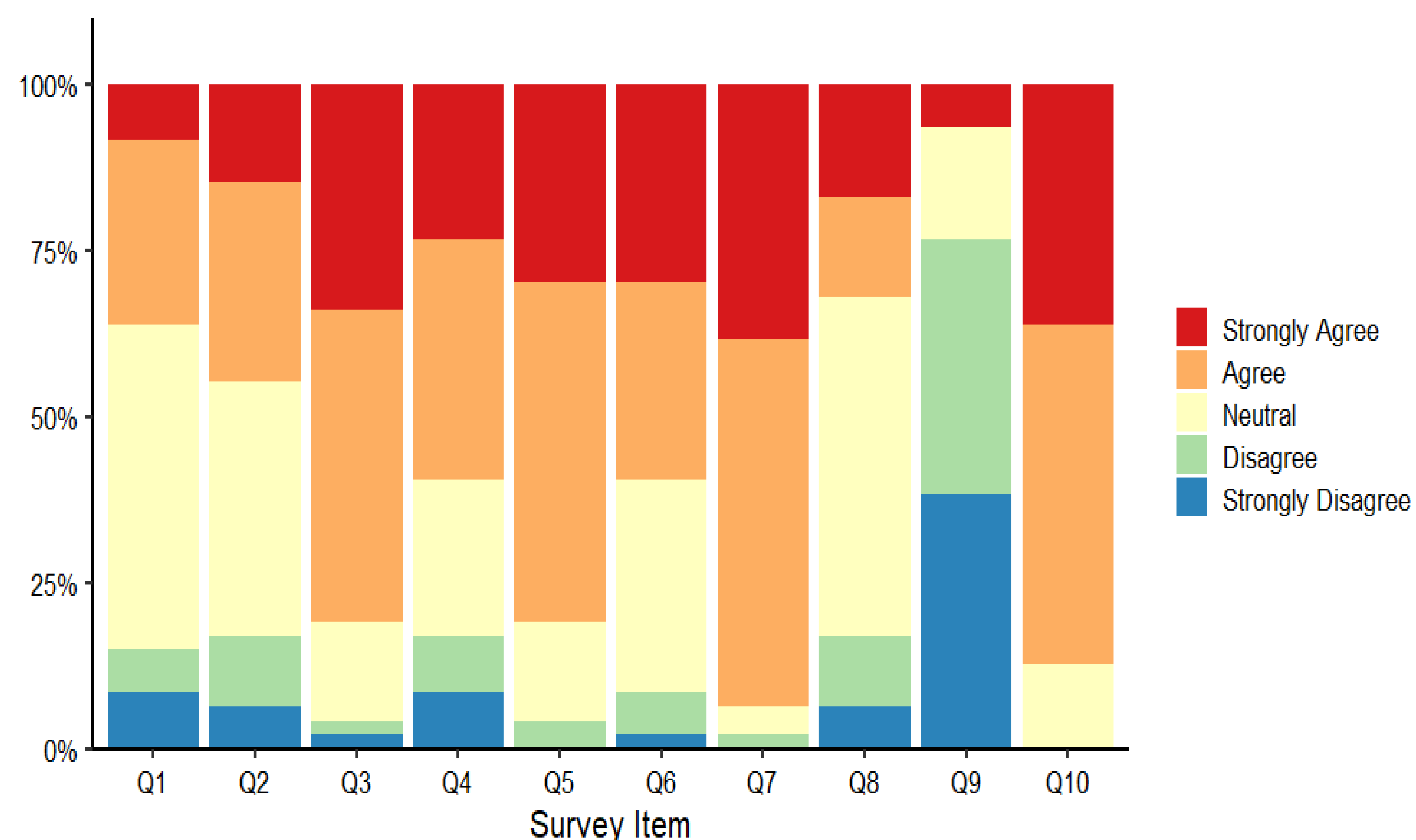
In this mixed-methods design, residents from three programs in a community hospital played “Well...For Me” in small groups as part of their orientation and in a wellness event. Residents completed a self-administered Wellness Activity Evaluation Form immediately after completion of the game. After participants completed the survey, a semi-structured, focus group interview was conducted to receive feedback on the game play and the impact of participating. Study authors served as focus group facilitators, taking notes for theme analysis. All data was anonymized before analysis. The survey consisted of ten questions and demographics. The initial survey design was created by the investigator, and subsequent refinements for clarity and brevity were completed by the graduate medical education and emergency medicine staff.

The game, “Well, for Me...” consists of questions which players take turns answering questions that required varying degrees of self-disclosure. Many questions are designed to highlight our shared experiences and relatability. Other questions are designed to spotlight unique characteristics or background that would be of interest. Taken together, the game is designed to get residents talking to each other in a way that initiates the process of connection and acceptance. The question bank used in the game was created by the investigator after multiple rounds of refinement by a diverse group of volunteers, including those with non-Judeo Christian traditions, non-primary English speakers and diverse ethnicities. The scoring mechanism consisted of each player voluntarily giving any amount of colored “applause tokens” to the other players for what they deem to be a good answer. The game was administered to multiple groups and lasts an average of 35-45 minutes.

Results

Forty seven participants completed the written survey. The results are presented below. Twenty of the participants were female and twenty six male with one unknown. Internal consistency of the survey was good (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.83).

Proportion of Responses



Question	Mean score
1. I feel better about my life after this activity	3.12
2. I feel like this activity helped me know myself better.	3.36
3. I feel like my group are better friends after this activity.	4.07
4. I hope to do this activity again soon.	3.56
5. I know my coworkers much better because of this activity.	4.06
6. I better understand that I am not alone in what is going on in my life.	3.79
7. This activity helped me feel more connected with my fellow residents.	4.30
8. This activity helped me see a new perspective on my life.	3.26
9. This activity was a waste of time. (Inverted score)	4.02
10. This activity was enjoyable.	4.23

Conclusion

Playing this game was rated as a pleasant activity but it accomplished more than that. By learning about the backgrounds, fears and drives of fellow residents, they, “Can avoid unnecessary strife.” (Resident comment focused on Reasonable limits) Another resident commented that, “All revealing ourselves helps create something.” That something is Connection and acceptance which will help residents on the days when they really need it.

Although unstructured social gatherings like going out for drinks are popular in residencies, there is no evidence that they benefit resident wellness.⁹ Playing “Well, For Me” demonstrates the capacity to provide the connection and acceptance from peers necessary to limit social isolation and assist with resident wellness. With limited wellness strategies to draw from, as many proven activities as possible are needed to help combat burnout and resident strife during training and beyond.

Theme	Example responses
Pleasant emotions	“Felt good” “A mental break” “Refreshed” “Fun” “Happiness” “No worries” “Silly” “My brain doesn’t feel fried from answering all these hard questions” “More relaxing”
Thought provoking	“Made me think about things I usually wouldn’t”
Shared peer knowledge	“Getting to know your co-workers” “All revealing ourselves helps create something”
Stressful	“Scared to share” “Exposing” “Sometimes awkward because they are really personal”
Self-preservation	“Not know or trust people at work at first”
Bonding	“Connected” “Open” “Use as an opportunity to let others know about me” “Fosters positive connection”
Accepting environment	“Reduce social tension” “Common ground” “Can open up to co-workers” “Offer advice to someone who needs help” “Break down walls”

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