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## Physician Suicide: Highest Rate in Professions



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As the issue of physician suicide comes to the fore in a bid to shake the stigma around this phenomenon, a group of physicians organised a national Day of Solidarity on Care2, a social networking site connecting activists. Named the silent epidemic, each year, an estimated 400 physicians in the U.S. die by suicide. According to Day of Solidarity, it is the highest, by percentage, in any profession.

Day of Solidarity was held last weekend in 11 cities, including the District of Columbia, Philadelphia, Austin and Chicago. The group said they expected 1,000 people to attend nationwide including doctors, medical students, therapists, professors, activists and family members of those who have committed suicide who spoke at the events.

An [online petition](#) has also been started by Ashley Maltz, M.D., an integrative medicine physician, and Pamela Wible, M.D., author of "Physician Suicide Letters--Answered," on the website. To date this has gathered over 66,000 signatures. It urges the Association of American Medical Colleges and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education to take action to prevent medical student and resident suicides.

"I have been shocked and saddened by the lack of support medical students and physicians face when encountering troubling times in their lives," Maltz, said in the announcement. Maltz has experienced the impact of mental pressures on healthcare professional first-hand; she has provided care to suicidal and depressed healthcare workers and lost a medical school classmate to suicide.

There is no standard reason why medical professionals and students take their own lives although characteristics of being perfectionists, having a strong work ethic and judging themselves harshly are common across the profession. A hospital environment where covert bullying and sleep deprivation are rife also contributes to the issue.

A study published last year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 21 to 43 percent of medical residents suffer from depression.

The healthcare sector is starting to develop programmes to help medics with support they need but the stigma attached to medics needing help is still strong. The American Medical Association has created STEPS Forward, a series of web-based interactive modules designed to help create a culture of wellness and resiliency.

Source: [FierceHealthcare](#)

Image Credit: Castle Connolly

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