



SPA H2O: Healers Helping Each Other

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“...I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul” -William Ernest Henly (Invictus)

It's no surprise that the SPA Wellbeing Committee frequently learns about SPA members facing personal health challenges. Many members navigating new medical diagnoses often find themselves at a crossroads, unsure of how to balance their family and professional responsibilities. Our experiences have underscored the vital support our SPA community offers during difficult times. Recognizing this need, we are excited to introduce **SPA H2O Healers Helping Each Other**, a group designed to be a beacon of support and comfort for SPA members combating illness. Together, we aim to strengthen our SPA community and provide a solid foundation of understanding and compassion to help alleviate the embarrassment, shame, and shock that often accompany a life-changing diagnosis.

Rationale - Our 10 WHYs for SPA H2O

- 1. Physicians-as-patients are a unique patient population with concerning vulnerabilities, principally our negativity bias, which may conflict with the essential human need for hope.**
 - a) Pressure and perception to be “invincible” to illness¹
 - b) Pressure to control medical situations²
 - c) Fear of the worst-case scenarios being actualized is often fueled by past patient interactions or flashbacks of patient conditions.³
- 2. The fear associated with disclosure of illness in the workplace and difficulties navigating this process.**
- 3. Increased risk of suicide.** At baseline, physicians, most especially anesthesiologists, especially female anesthesiologists, bear a suicide risk of approximately 2.4 times the general population⁴, and a cancer diagnosis increases this risk further. Even curable cancers can severely affect patients' quality of life or self-image and cause psychiatric stress, which can result in suicide.⁵
- 4. Some of us who have faced serious illness during our careers could have benefited from peer-to-peer support.**
- 5. We recognize the challenge of maintaining our HIPPA privacy and confidentiality, which may be further exacerbated when we pursue care within our own medical systems.**
- 6. We recognize that some of us may delay recommended cancer screening, diagnostic workups, and treatments because of professional responsibilities and guilt associated with the need to request FML or time off.**
- 7. We recognize that a life-changing medical diagnosis may make returning to work in the same capacity challenging, if not impossible.** Accommodations may be necessary depending on the diagnosis and treatment plan.³
- 8. There is an unmet need to educate physicians on how best to support our peers who are facing personal illness/loss.** There are no studies that describe ways to support colleagues or trainees who are facing personal illness or loss.³
- 9. Physicians-as-patients may need spiritual support but may not know how to access that support.** Spirituality has been associated with psychological coping, better adjustment to cancer, and maintaining hope, yet physicians view spirituality differently than patients.⁶
- 10. We care about our community and colleagues!** Contact us at SPAcares@pedsanesthesia.org.

References:

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