FALL 2025 ISSUE

Kansas City MEDICINE

JOURNAL OF THE KANSAS CITY MEDICAL SOCIETY

Retirement Among Physicians

Page 8

Table of Contents

We are all athletes... some of us are just out of training 4

KCMS Role in Physician Suicide Awareness and Physician Well-being 6

Retirement Among Physicians 8

Missouri State Medical Association: Serving as the Voice of Physicians 10

Kansas City Health Systems Earn AMA "Joy in Medicine®" Recognition 11

Managing Editor: Micah Flint
Contributing Editors: John Hagan, III, MD, Charles W. Van Way, III, MD
Pediatric Medical Editor: Jennifer Flint, MD
Layout Editor: Holly Grimwood

Official publication of the Kansas City Medical Society.
Managed and published by **evos Innovations.**
www.evosinnovations.com

KCMS: 2025 I 34 | Q3

We are all athletes... some of us are just out of training

Author

Dr. Brad Garstang

Dr. Brad Garstang is a family physician in Liberty, Missouri. He has practiced medicine for 23 years and is the President-elect of the Kansas City Medical Society.

As we continue to discuss wellness and wellbeing within the healthcare provider community, one recurring recommendation is to exercise. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, "If we wish to live a fulfilling life, there must be a balance between intellectual, spiritual, and physical practices, or habits." Creating a habit of exercise can be challenging for us all.

My personal exercise habit began 25 years ago during my family medicine residency here in Kansas City. Recently married and having gained some sympathy weight with the birth of our first child, my wife and I signed up to run our first marathon. What began with fund raising and travel became deep friendships with other athletes, fascination in what our bodies could do, and enough dopamine endorphins to create a deep groove in the record of my brain after 50 marathons and 15 full and ½ Ironman triathlons.

James Clear in his book "Atomic Habits" recommends "habit stacking", to make it easier to integrate a new habit into our lives. The goal is to link a new desired habit to an existing, established routine. By using a strong, enjoyable behavior as a trigger for the new one, you build a clear cue reducing mental effort.

For instance, I enjoy streaming my favorite sci-fi shows, but save them to watch while I am spinning on my indoor bicycle. I do the same with favorite podcasts or audiobooks while running.

In counseling patients, I ask them to come up with SMART goals with their exercise rather than vague nonspecific goals. How often? Location? Intensity (heart rate, RPE)? Duration? Solo or with others?

The CDC physical activity guidelines are 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity exercise (walking 3 mph) or 75 minutes

of vigorous-intensity exercise (jogging). Muscle-strengthening exercise is recommended twice a week. Only ¼ adults and 1/5 adolescents are meeting these guidelines.

> *Focusing on the improved function, having fun with others, and the process of reaching those goals helps more than external goals of weight loss or how we look in the mirror.*

To reach these guidelines, encourage patients to set a goal of walking/running a 5K on Thanksgiving with friends or family, climb a trail in Colorado, travel with family, or golf 18 holes. Focusing on the improved function, having fun with others, and the process of reaching those goals helps more than external goals of weight loss or how we look in the mirror.

One of my 86-year-old patients, and running mentor, still walk/runs a 5K here in Kansas City every weekend. He finds purpose in supporting a worthy cause, keeping his independence and function, and finding community with others.

As we move into the winter and holidays, where many become less active, let's all set an example for our families and patients and create consistent habits of exercise.

KCMS Role in Physician Suicide Awareness and Physician Well-being

Author

Stephen Salanski, MD

Chair, KCMS/KCMSF Wellness and Prevention Committee

Stephen Salanski, MD is a retired Family Physician who spent the majority of his career in academics as Faculty and Program Director of the Research Family Medicine Residency Program. He is a KCMS Board Member (and Past President of KCMS), Immediate Past Board Chair of the KCMS Foundation, and Co-Chair of the KCMS/KCMSF Wellness and Prevention Committee. He is also the current Board Chair of the Center for Practical Bioethics and represents KCMS on the KC Health Collaborative, serving as Treasurer of that Board. He is also on the Acrux KC Board of Directors and the Lee's Summit Wellness Commission.

Suicide is a major public health concern and a leading cause of death in the United States. Physicians have one of the highest suicide rates of any profession. *The American College of Emergency Physicians* estimates that roughly 300-400 physicians die by suicide each year in the US - approximately one every day. The organization Vital Signs: The Campaign to Prevent Physician Suicide estimates that a million Americans lose their physician to suicide each year. This has been felt locally with the suicide deaths of two Northland physicians two years ago. These deaths not only impact family and friends, but also professional colleagues and thousands of patients – in fact the entire community.

Last year and again this year, KCMS has joined with a collaborative group of healthcare organizations in the KC Metro to recognize the enormity of this problem. This involves participating in the National Physician Suicide Awareness Day on September 17 – including a moment of silence in solidarity and remembrance for those lost. These participating healthcare organizations are also sharing resources regarding physician well-being and counseling opportunities for healthcare professionals and trainees.

The current local collaborating organizations include the three major Graduate Medical Education (GME) Residency Training Institutions in Kansas City, all three local medical schools, multiple hospitals and private physician offices – all supported by the Kansas City Medical Society (KCMS).

While National Physician Suicide Awareness Day is important for raising awareness of this issue, the problem exists 365 days a year. The factors that lead to the progression towards suicide include burnout, anxiety, depression, and substance use – all compounded by the stigma which prevents physicians from seeking assistance for these mental/behavioral health concerns. This is more than just a problem for practicing physicians. A study published May 14, 2025 in JAMA Network Open which

was led by researchers at the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) found that suicide was the leading cause of deaths among residents and fellows – with the highest incidence of these suicide deaths being in the PGY1 year.

KCMS is focusing on continuous physician well-being by providing resources that can be used by hospital medical staffs, GME institutions, as well as individual physicians. These resources can be found on the KCMS Website www.kcmedicine.org under the Wellness and Prevention tab, specifically the bullet for Physician Wellness Speaker's Bureau and the bullet for Physician Suicide Prevention.

The Speaker's Bureau is intended for interactive presentations with hospital medical staff or outpatient medical group meetings, grand rounds, and GME or medical student education. There are a number of physician speakers and a variety of topics. These topics include: "Physician Burnout"; "Physician Wellness Through Exercise, Music, and Hobbies"; "Suicide Prevention – Know the Warning Signs"; "Physician Grief"; "Serving Abroad, Healing Within: Medical Missions as a Path to Reducing Physician Burnout"; "Second Victim Syndrome"; as well as other topics.

The website also includes local and national resources for Physician Suicide Awareness and Prevention. These include resources from *Vital Signs: The Campaign to Prevent Physician Suicide*, the American Medical Association, the *Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation*, and many others.

In addition, KCMS is collaborating with a local Psychologist who specializes in working with physicians and other medical professionals – so that individual physicians can access mental health/behavioral health assistance without the perceived stigma and concern of using their own hospital/health system's EAP. Other psychologists may be added to this list.

Vital Signs Website Resources for Immediate Support

- Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.
- Physician Support Line – a national free and confidential line supported by volunteer psychiatrists.
- Call 1-800-409-0141 from 8AM until 1AM EST.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness Crisis Text Line – free 24/7 support.
- Text 'SCRUBS' to 741741 for help.

KCMS hosts a number of networking opportunities for physicians to have social interaction with their peers from around the KC region. These usually include short CME presentations. KCMS is also exploring the possibility of a CME event in 2026 with the likelihood of some of the topics relating to physician well-being.
Finally, it is important to recognize in your colleagues (or yourself) the five warning signs as per the Vital Signs: *The Campaign to Prevent Suicide* acronym HEART:

VS #1: Health – increasing use of medications and/or alcohol or illicit drugs; talking about wanting to hurt themselves or die.

VS #2: Emotions – experiencing extreme mood swings; feeling hopeless or having no purpose.

VS #3: Attitude – being negative about professional and personal life; having inappropriate outbursts of anger or sadness.

VS #4: Relationships – withdrawing or isolating themselves from family, friends, and coworkers; talking about being a burden to others.

VS #5: Temperament – being anxious or agitated, behaving recklessly; being uncomfortable, tired, or in unbearable pain.

If you see a colleague (or yourself) experiencing these warning signs, seek help by accessing the resources on the KCMS website noted above. You can also call the National Suicide Crisis Line 988 (24 hours daily); Physician Support Line 1-888-409-0141 (open daily 9:00AM to Midnight); or contact the National Alliance on Mental Illness Crisis Text Line by texting **SCRUBS to 741741.**

The Kansas City Medical Society is supporting the well-being and mental/behavioral health of all Kansas City physicians. Please join us in these efforts! Become a member of the Society to support this extremely important work! Explore the website to understand the available well-being and mental/behavioral health resources. Encourage your hospital, medical group, or GME institution to utilize speakers/topics from the KCMS Speaker's Bureau. For more information, please contact Micah Flint, KCMS Executive Director, through the KCMS Website or Facebook.

Retirement Among Physicians

Author

Ted Higgins, MD, FACS

Founder, Higgins Brothers Surgicenter for Hope, Fonds Parisien, Haiti
higginsbrotherssurgicenter.org

Dr. Ted Higgins, a vascular surgeon, has dedicated his career to expanding surgical access in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Inspired by early mission experiences, he founded the Higgins Brothers Surgicenter for Hope in 2016, honoring his family's medical legacy. His work continues to transform healthcare, train local surgeons, and bring hope to underserved communities.

When discussing retirement among physicians, there is generally a wide range of emotions that ensues: anticipation, anxiety, fright, pleasure, and despair, the list goes on. It is a time when hobbies can resume, the "honey do" list is accomplished, golf handicaps are lowered, and travel plans initiated. For many this is enough, it is a time to reflect and enjoy the sunset years of a well-earned retirement life.

There are other retiring physicians though who need help to fill the personal void left from interactions with patients and medical personnel. We never stop becoming the person we are. Retirement for many requires a connection that satisfies the need to assist others. To those aspiring retiring medical providers, I would suggest an often-maligned word in our field...volunteer.

There are wonderful community opportunities to help in soup kitchens, clothes closets, museum docents, day care centers, and many other community volunteer activities to help others. The challenge is no longer about building a medical practice, raising and providing for your family, or even about your personal accomplishments, income, or reputation. It's now about the causes that help the well-being of others. David Brooks, the noted NY Times columnist and Yale professor talks about the quest for a moral life in his book, "The Second Mountain." While the first mountain is the progression we each follow in developing our careers, goals, and families, the second mountain is about societal causes that benefit others. No longer is our ego a factor, it's about helping others, and providing an opportunity.

One of the best examples of community service I'm familiar with is participation in national and international medical mission trips. It amazes me that, so few Americans understand the lack of medical care in third world countries. We take for granted our access to medical care that includes nurses, doctors, urgent care, and emergency departments. In much of the world traveling 1- 2 days

to seek medical attention is the norm. Care may not be provided even then until payment is received. There is no IMTALA law in 3rd world countries requiring emergency care be provided by medical facilities.

> *For many this is enough, it is a time to reflect and enjoy the sunset years of a well-earned retirement life.*

This type of mission experience whether in an inner city, Indian reservation, or 3rd world country changes the lives of people, not the patients as much as the medical providers. The gratitude they receive from patients is genuine. It reorients priorities and broadens the horizons of those medical providers who experience these situations. It is an experience for all ages as everyone benefits.

So when considering retirement there are many local community locations and international opportunities that would benefit greatly from the experience and knowledge of a retired physician. It doesn't even need to be in the medical field. In this world of AI and computers, the human component is still the most important factor in providing medical care.

Missouri State Medical Association: Serving as the Voice of Physicians

Since its founding in 1850, the Missouri State Medical Association (MSMA) has served as the leading advocate for physicians, patients, and the practice of medicine in Missouri. Today, MSMA represents more than 4,000 physicians, residents, and medical students, offering advocacy, education, and professional development resources to its members.

Headquartered in Jefferson City, MSMA's mission is to promote the science and art of medicine, protect the health of the public, and strengthen the medical profession. MSMA is a nonprofit, physician-led organization dedicated to organized medicine and ensuring physicians' voices are heard at every level of government.

Structure and Representation

MSMA is governed through a Council representing eight districts across Missouri. The Kansas City metropolitan area is part of District 7, which is represented by:

- **Dr. Joanne Loethen** (University Health)
- **Dr. Amy Patel (**Liberty Hospital)
- **Dr. Sarah Florio** (Saint Luke's Health System)
- **Blake Cooper, MD, MPH** (Retina Associates Kansas City)

These councilors bring the unique perspectives of Kansas City physicians to the state level, ensuring our community's voice is part of statewide decision-making.

Advocacy in Action

MSMA advocates at the Missouri Capitol and maintains relationships with the Department of Health, the Department of Insurance, and the Board of Healing Arts. Its dedicated Legislative Affairs and Government Relations team works year-round to represent physicians in matters of health policy, medical ethics, and patient access to care.

In addition to advocacy, MSMA serves communities across Missouri through educational conferences, professional development opportunities, and support for physicians at all career stages.

Why Membership Matters

In today's evolving health care landscape, physicians face challenges on multiple fronts — from regulatory changes to practice consolidation to administrative burden. Membership in MSMA ensures that physicians remain united and have a strong, organized voice advocating for high-quality, physician-led, team-based care.

As MSMA states: We are the voice of medicine in Missouri. Every physician's involvement strengthens that voice. Join today at www.msma.org.

Upcoming MSMA-Sponsored Events

- Physician Advocacy Day at the Capitol – Tuesday, March 3, Jefferson City
  Flooding the Capitol with white coats makes a big impact on legislators who recognize the physician commitment to preserving high-quality patient care. Join colleagues from across the state in meeting with legislators and making the physician voice heard at the State Capitol.
- 168th MSMA Annual Convention – April 10–12, 2026, DoubleTree by Hilton, Chesterfield
  Mark your calendar for a statewide gathering of physicians, residents, and medical students for networking, leadership development, CME, and shaping MSMA policy.

MSMA depends on engaged physicians to lead advocacy and shape the future of medicine in Missouri. Beyond being a member, MSMA is always seeking physicians to step into leadership roles and strengthen the voice of medicine in Missouri.

Opportunities

- Serve on MSMA Council or committees
- Advocate for physicians and patients at the state level
- Help shape policy and support physician well-being across Missouri

Learn more at www.msma.org or contact Council Chair, Dr. Joanne Loethen, directly for leadership opportunities.

Kansas City Health Systems Earn AMA "Joy in Medicine®" Recognition

Great news for our region: four Kansas City health systems were nationally recognized by the w for their commitment to physician well-being:

- **Children's Mercy Hospital**
- **Kansas City Veterans Affairs Hospital**
- **The University of Kansas Health System**
- **University Health**

What is the Joy in Medicine® Program?

The AMA's Joy in Medicine® Health System Recognition Program honors organizations that reduce physician burnout and build workplaces where joy, meaning, and purpose in medicine can thrive.

Recognition is based on evidence-informed strategies that health systems put into practice, such as:

- Improving workflows and team-based care
- Strengthening leadership and organizational culture
- Enhancing EHR usability and operational efficiency
- Providing peer support and well-being resources

Levels of Recognition

Awards are granted at **Bronze, Silver, and Gold** levels and are **valid for two years,** reflecting the depth and impact of each system's efforts.

Why it Matters

When physician well-being improves:

- **Patients benefit** from safer, more consistent, and compassionate care.
- **Clinicians benefit** from healthier teams and sustainable careers.
- **Communities benefit** as hospitals retain talent and expand access.

Kansas City physicians can be proud—our institutions are leading a national movement to support the medical workforce and create environments where clinicians can do their best work.

Learn more: Visit the AMA's Joy in Medicine® program page at **ama-assn.org.**

Thank You

TO OUR PARTNERS

MAWD
MAWD PATHOLOGY GROUP

Clarity Care
Imaging and Specialty Care
claritycarekc.com

Incyte

ucb
Inspired by **patients.**
Driven by **science.**

evos

KANSAS CITY
MEDICAL SOCIETY
kcmedicine.org