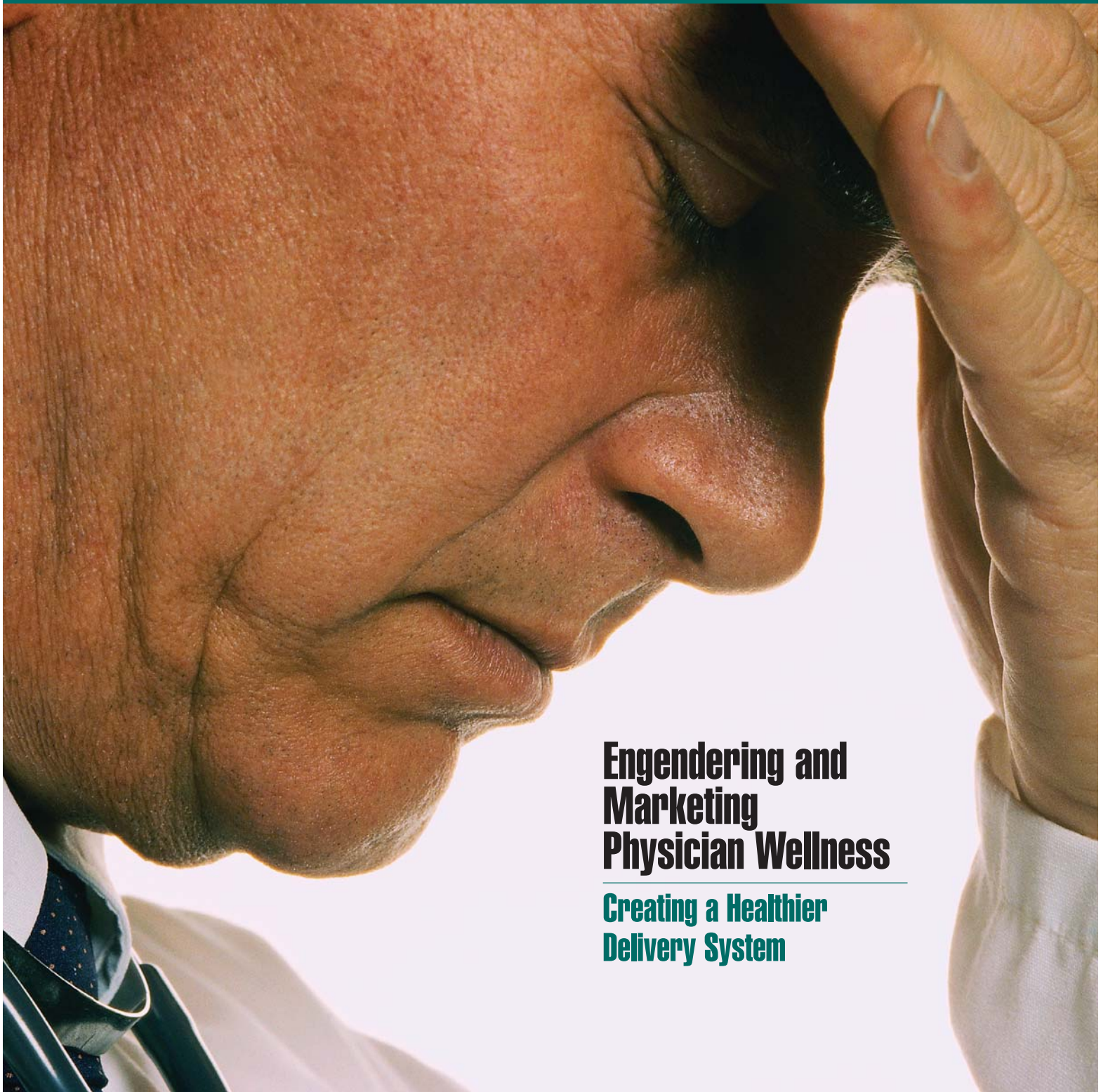


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**Engendering and  
Marketing  
Physician Wellness**

**Creating a Healthier  
Delivery System**

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**INSIDE: HEALTH CARE AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

# Engendering and Marketing Physician Wellness: Creating a Healthier Delivery System

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**"M**ost IPAs see physicians the same way that Colonel Sanders looks at chickens." So spoke an attendee at one of Hill Physicians' recent two-day physician wellness seminars, "Finding Balance in a Medical Life." Fortunately, this physician went on to say that sponsorship of wellness seminars helped him to believe that at least this IPA, Hill Physicians, cared about its providers as individuals rather than as commodities. In early 2003, when Hill considered promoting education to address physician wellness, it was uncertain whether its physicians would be interested in attending programs on this topic. Six seminars and three-hundred participants later, the organization is continuing to attract new and repeat attendees to the Finding Balance workshops as well as to the adjunctive programs developed to address additional needs which the seminar participants have identified.

## Why Physician Wellness?

Physician fatigue and burnout have increased steadily over the last 2 decades. A 2001 survey of 2,608 physicians reported that over the preceding 5 years, 60 percent of physicians had experienced decreased enthusiasm toward medical practice and 87 percent

believed the overall morale of physicians had declined. When asked to delineate the reasons for their discontent, 74 percent cited excessive administrative duties and 56 percent said they did not have enough time for their families, hobbies, and friends.

IN EARLY 2003, HILL PHYSICIANS CONSIDERED PROMOTING EDUCATION TO ADDRESS PHYSICIAN WELLNESS.

In 1999 Erica Frank, M.D., and colleagues published "Career Satisfaction of U.S. Women Physicians: Results from The Women Physicians' Health Study."<sup>1</sup> This study was unusual for two reasons: First, it focused on women physicians, a growing part of the nation's medical base (by 2010, 30 percent of all practicing physicians will be women). Secondly, it looked at lifestyle issues in relation to career satisfaction. This study of 4,501 female physicians showed that 31 percent of respondents would not choose a career in medicine again, and that an additional 38 percent were unhappy with their specialties. Higher dissatisfaction was linked to lack of work control, lack of time with family and for hobbies, lack of spiritual or religious life, and lack of time with children. Subsequent studies with male physicians supported these findings. In essence, physicians reported that there was a lack of balance in their lives.

## Why Should Medical Groups Care?

Hill Physicians is the nation's largest IPA, representing approximately 2,200 primary and specialty care physicians caring for more than 330,000 commercial HMO and Medicare HMO enrollees in Northern California. The IPA suspected that stress and other psychosocial factors were driving as many as 70 percent of patient visits. Under the auspices of its Integrated Health Department, programs had been implemented to encourage physicians to address the whole person and not simply the symptoms the patient brought to the medical encounter. But the IPA was doing little or nothing to address the *whole physician*.

Development of a physician wellness program was a natural outgrowth of IPA leadership's interest in holistic health. The primary intent was to help physicians become more personally and professionally contented. Several other secondary outcomes were considered potential benefits of physician wellness programs. California's Pay for Performance initiative directs health plans to financially reward IPAs and medical groups (and through them, their physicians) on excellent clinical outcomes, increased use of electronic technology, and superior patient satisfaction. It was expected that giving physicians the skills to better manage their own stresses—to be less reactive to difficult co-workers and patients—could improve patient satisfaction scores. It was hoped that giving physicians some time away from their practices in a supportive environment could mitigate some resistances to change. We hoped that physicians who were early adopters of the wellness program might be identified as potential champions for other initiatives. Finally, while physician retention had not been a problem for the IPA, any program that improved providers' health and happiness might

influence the decisions physicians made to stay in practice longer and to be more effective caregivers.

### **If We Build It, Will They Come?**

The IPA's senior management was unsure that physicians would be willing to attend programs on physician wellness. The IPA had never offered seminars for its network members, and the brief CME presentations offered during evening business meetings were always on clinical issues. When polled, a subset of providers opined that physician wellness seemed too "touchy-feely" to be of interest and that Type A behavior, lack of time, and large burdens of stress were seen as badges of success. Some stated that offering a wellness workshop implied that physicians were broken and needed fixing. An assumption was made that providers saw inadequate reimbursement and managed care as the causes of their dissatisfaction, and that asking them to pay to attend a workshop that espoused different causality would be a "hard sell." Finally, asking providers to leave their families for an entire weekend to attend a seminar on life balance seemed contrary to the behavior we were trying to encourage. Because IPA management had so many concerns about the likelihood of successful implementation, it was decided that a small-step approach to engaging and assessing physician interest would be best.

### **Starting Small**

As part of its ongoing network management program, Hill Physicians holds quarterly two-hour evening panel meetings for its PCPs in twelve locations across its network. Before scheduling the weekend Finding Balance seminars, the founder of the program, Dr. Lee

Lipsenthal, agreed to present one-hour CME programs at all of these meetings. The evening programs focused on physician satisfaction and the impact of stress on physiology and cognition, using data and demonstrations related to brain

chemistry and heart rate variability. It was considered crucial to ground the mind/body

connection topic in hard science and also to be somewhat experiential to engage audience interest in attending the more intensive weekend program. At the end of each meeting, attendees completed a form to assess interest in a longer follow-up program. Questions assessing preferred time, place, spousal attendance, and costs also were included. Those willing to be solicited to attend the two-day program, when scheduled, could supply contact information. About 30 percent of Hill's PCPs attend the panel meetings in their geographic area. More than 60 percent of providers who attended a panel meeting presentation expressed interest in being contacted about the follow-up weekend program. Thus, we felt a sufficient interest base existed to schedule the first weekend program.

### **Mass Marketing**

The following marketing strategy has proved successful: Ten-twelve weeks prior to the seminar dates, a personal letter from the Medical Director promoting the two-day weekend program, along with a flier and brochure detailing the seminars, is sent to all network providers (a total of 2,200). This much lead time is required to allow physicians to clear their schedules. A follow-up mailing is sent seven weeks prior to the date. An early registration discount is offered. In the initial roll-

out, the physicians who expressed interest in attending due to exposure at the panel meetings received one version of the mailing; those who had not had prior exposure received a different one. Subsequently, past participants receive a different version than those who have never attended.

A hotel central to Hill's network is chosen in a resort area (the Napa Valley) that is appealing to physicians and spouses, although only Saturday night is available for non-seminar-related activities. Meetings begin early and end early on Sundays to allow participants to go wine tasting or to miss the traffic returning home. Features highlighted to increase the appeal of the seminar included a Saturday night optional (\$20) wine tasting, a discounted rate with the hotel, and a 50 percent match by Hill towards their registration fee (actually a discounted rate negotiated with Finding Balance). Spouses are invited to attend free, and 12 free continuing medical education credits are offered (CMEs, CEUs for nurses, or Board of Behavioral Science credits). Lunches are provided (other meals are not part of the program). Thus, costs are shared between the attendees and the IPA, with each physician paying about \$400 for the weekend, including lodging. The first workshop offered was oversubscribed, after which subsequent programs filled due to word of mouth and "cold" mailings.

### **Content of the Workshops**

The 14-hour Finding Balance in a Medical Life programs for the physicians and their significant others are offered to groups of 50 people per session. The significant others are invited because their involvement is useful in helping the physician create a plan towards life balance. The Finding Balance program is delivered in an experiential, workshop

style. The core content of this program includes the following:

- Understanding the stresses of a medical practice
- Understanding how stress diminishes productivity
- Information about the adverse health ramifications of stress
- Learning and evaluating how the individual physician contributes to that stress due to his or her personality traits such as Type A behavior, perfectionism, and a high need for control
- Learning tools for managing emotional stress
- Tools and practices to enhance communication skills, especially listening
- An evaluation of the individual's personality structure with tools to help modify those traits.

#### After the Workshops

The IPA issues a follow-up newsletter to attendees periodically to market additional programs and adjunctive services and to reinforce learnings from the weekend workshop.

The IPA had considered inviting physicians with office managers instead of spouses to the Finding Balance seminars. Instead, it chose to implement a different workshop for the office staff. In 2004 an eight-hour program, Bringing Balance to Your Practice Team, was designed and implemented to serve the staff of the physicians' offices. There are two four-hour sessions offered over two weeks. Some physicians join their staff at these meetings. This program includes the following:

- Discussion about typical stressors

in the medical work place

- Tools to manage stress
- Tools to enhance communication

Fees are kept low and are the same for one attendee or an entire office. It is common for physicians to close their practices so their whole staff can attend.

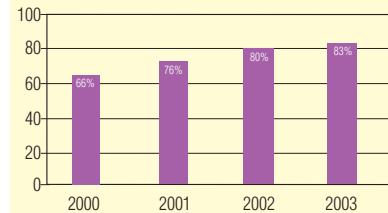
Most recently, a six-hour refresher/advanced program was added for physician graduates of the Finding Balance program. More stress management tools are learned and practiced with the expectation of increased implementation of newly learned skills.

#### What Has Been Accomplished?

The workshops are equally well-subscribed by PCPs and by specialists. Evaluations are consistently excellent. Physicians enjoy meeting other physicians to whom they have referred, but never spoken. At the workshops, IPA staff members have the opportunity to interact with physicians in a relaxed atmosphere for an extended time, which, as hoped, has led to identifying physicians who are interested in championing other Hill initiatives. Physician and staff satisfaction with the IPA has continuously improved since 2000, so the 2003 results (see Figures 1 and 2) cannot be solely attributed to the physicians or office staff workshops, but these programs contribute to our success. Efforts are being made to entice all new physicians in the network to attend the programs, so as to start them off with better coping skills and, hopefully, an appreciation that the IPA cares about them. That word of mouth continues to be the major source of registrations speaks to the need for addressing physician wellness and to the success of the Finding Balance in a Medical Life programs in addressing this need.

### Figure 1 Physician Satisfaction

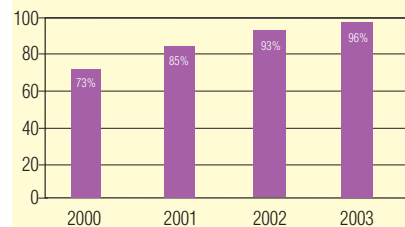
Trend in Overall Satisfaction with Hill Physicians



Source: Hill Physicians Annual Practice Manager Satisfaction Survey

### Figure 2 Practice Manager Satisfaction

Trend in Overall Satisfaction with Hill Physicians



Source: Hill Physicians Annual Practice Manager Satisfaction Survey

#### References

1. Erica Frank, Julia E. McMurray, Mark Linzer, and Lisa Elon, for the Society of General Internal Medicine Career Satisfaction Study Group. 1999. Career Satisfaction of U.S. Women Physicians: Results from the Women Physicians' Health Study. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, July 12, 1999. 159 (13): 1417-1426.

*Vivian Barron is director of Integrated Health at Hill Physicians Medical Group. Lee Lipsenthal, M.D., is a board-certified internist with postgraduate training in cholesterol disorders and is the founder of Finding Balance in a Medical Life. For more information on Finding Balance in a Medical Life presentations, contact Larry Cooper at Health Classics, (800) 769-0638 or <healthcl@silcom.com>, or visit <www.healthclassics.com>.*