



Is Medicine Still a Calling?

Exploring physician attitudes about purpose in medicine

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New research from Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com explores the concept of purpose in medicine and its impact on how physicians feel about their jobs. Overall, the data provides hope that while the system itself continues to face significant challenges, the people who work within it are there because they felt a calling to help others, and most still find meaning in their work. This is good news, as the data also suggests that a sense of purpose lends itself to greater resiliency and higher engagement levels — meaning clinicians with a strong sense of purpose are generally happier at work and better equipped to manage the many challenges they face.

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Helen Falkner

Regional Vice President
of Recruiting
Jackson Physician Search

As the daughter of a physician, I grew up hearing about the personal relationships my dad built with his patients. For him, medicine was more than just a profession — it was about the

people he cared for and the trust he built with them and their families. Even today, like so many Baby Boomers, he has passed the retirement age, yet he continues to practice — not because he has to, but because those relationships still fuel his passion for patient care.

I see firsthand how meaningful connections can shape a physician's career. Whether it's helping a physician find the right opportunity or supporting a client in finding the right physician for their community, I'm driven by the same desire to create lasting, impactful relationships.

I love hearing why physicians choose medicine and which parts of the job they find most fulfilling. I also know that even the most passionate physicians can feel frustrated. For younger physicians, it's often the exhaustion of residency or a first job that didn't turn out as expected. At every stage of their careers, many physicians are discouraged by the corporatization of medicine, administrative burdens, lack of autonomy and patient disrespect. Over time, those challenges can drain the joy from their work and make physicians feel disconnected from the reason they chose to practice medicine in the first place. The report offers some guidance on how healthcare professionals can reconnect with their purpose and feel more joy at work — because when physicians feel fulfilled, their patients can feel the difference.



Miechia A. Esco, M.D., Ph.D., MBA, FACS

Chief Medical Resource Officer,
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"Man wished a physician who had the superhuman power or according to the predilection of the epoch, the scientific knowledge to heal, but also the saintly selflessness to devote

this power unstintingly to the service of his sickness. These are contradictory qualities, but the full possession of even one of them is rarely given to mortal man — to seek all of them in one person is a supernatural goal."

In 1967, Dr. Szilagyi, a pioneer in my field of vascular surgery, wrote the above poignant commentary on a paradox in his paper, "The Physician: Savant, Saint, or Servant."¹

When reflecting on my decades of experiences, I fluctuate within the paradox of savant, saint and servant. When attempting to master them all at the same time, I recall that it is a supernatural goal. Purpose at times may feel like a supernatural goal. However, it should be continuously re-explored for joy and meaning and then courageously executed in life.

The research presented herein elucidates this. Medicine is complex. Purpose and passion in life are complex. The addition of the paradox of those who dedicate their lives to the craft in an ever-changing ecosystem could be daunting. However, this study provides a starting point of concrete data and musings on purpose in medicine and the myriad of factors that influence it.



Executive Summary



WHAT MADE YOU PURSUE A CAREER IN MEDICINE?

For some, this path is one they've always wanted to take. For others, it's a response to a personal experience — good or bad — within the healthcare system. Some were advised by a mentor or professor, while others were pushed by a parent. And while some pursue a career in medicine for stability or financial gain, most practitioners are motivated by a greater desire to serve humanity. It's exactly this factor — the sense of fulfilling a higher purpose — that keeps most clinicians inspired day-to-day, despite the growing obstacles they face.

New research conducted by Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com in January 2025 reveals what drives clinicians to pursue the field of medicine — and what keeps them going. More than 1,200 physicians and advanced practice providers answered questions about finding purpose in medicine. The goal of this research was to truly understand...is medicine still a calling?

Multiple studies suggest that purpose is essential to happiness² and meaningful work is critical for job satisfaction³. This new research suggests those with a strong sense of purpose are likely to handle the challenges of the field — from burnout to systemic issues — with greater resiliency than those who feel less passion and purpose. They are also more likely to feel engaged and plan to stay with their employers.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- **Most respondents felt “called” to medicine.** 90% of respondents saw medicine as a calling when they began, but more than half say the feeling has diminished.
- **Altruism is an inspiration.** 73% of respondents said “helping others/serving humanity” was a key motivator for pursuing medicine.
- **Work gives them purpose.** Half of respondents rated their ability to live their purpose at work as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale.
- **Generations have different drivers.** Baby Boomers are more likely to report a strong sense of calling and the highest levels of passion for their work. Gen Z was most likely to say they are motivated to pursue medicine by a desire to serve humanity.
- **APPs feel called to their work.** Advanced practice providers (APPs) are more likely than physicians to say medicine was definitely a calling.
- **Satisfaction is higher for those who feel a calling.** Those who say medicine was a calling are more likely to feel satisfied with their jobs, say they would pursue medicine again and encourage young people to pursue medicine.
- **Region and work type have little impact on beliefs about purpose.** When looking at locum tenens vs. permanent clinicians, there were no statistically significant differences in beliefs about passion and purpose. The same was true when looking at urban, suburban and rural clinicians, and by practice setting. All were equally likely to feel medicine is a calling.

These findings give us many reasons to feel hopeful. Despite the circumstances outside of our control, if physicians and advanced practice providers can identify those activities that fuel a sense of purpose, they may be intentional in their attempts to reconnect with it and, in doing so, discover more joy in their work.

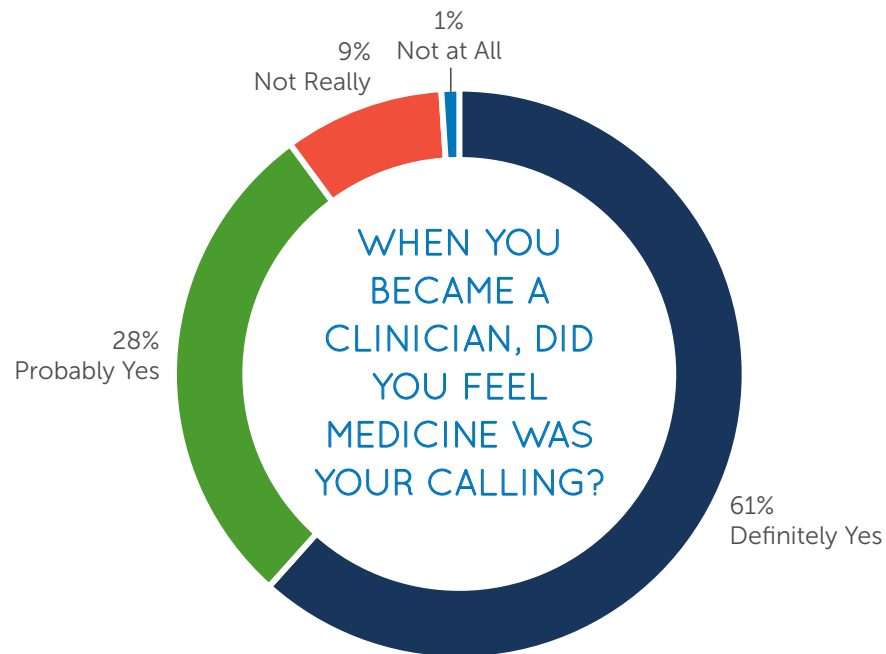
Medicine as a Calling



Medicine as a Calling



Nine out of ten respondents said they felt medicine was their calling.



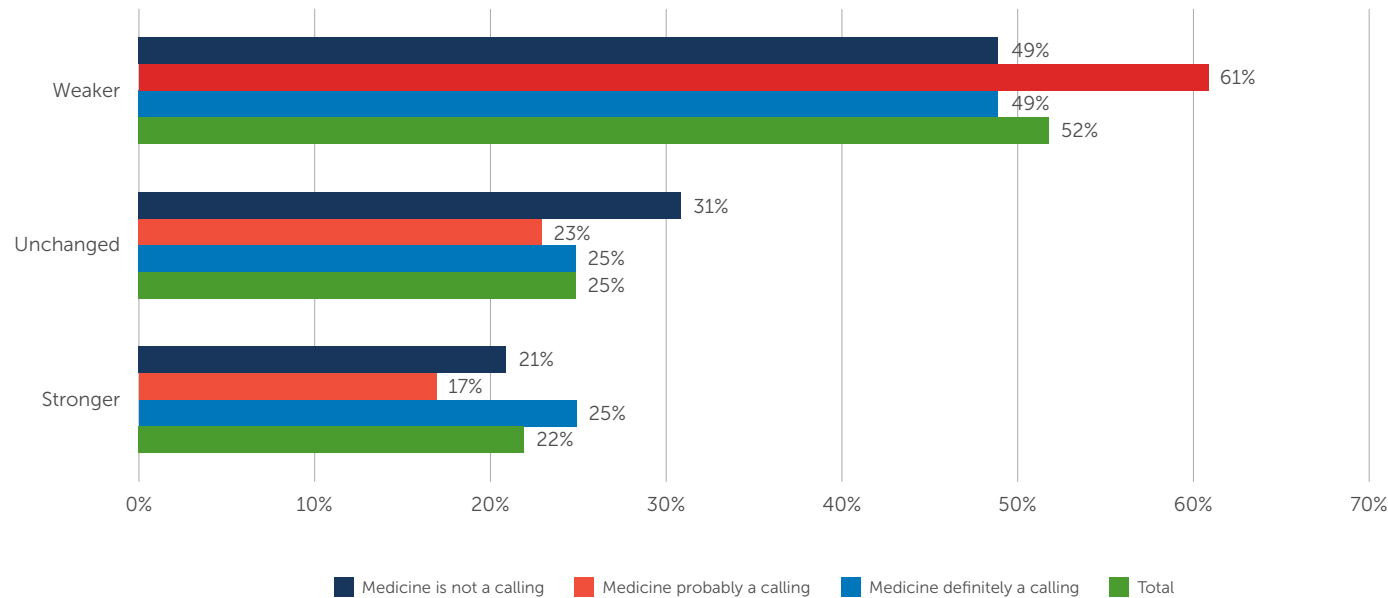
The 61% who said medicine was definitely their calling were more likely to say the feeling has grown stronger over time (25%). These respondents not only have a strong sense of calling and passion but also genuinely enjoy the practice of medicine and the connection with patients and colleagues.

Half of all respondents said their sense of calling has weakened over time, and 10% of respondents said medicine was not really or not at all a calling. These respondents who did not view medicine as a calling were mainly motivated by more practical aspects like job security (56%) and financial rewards (40%). Overall, they are more pessimistic about the practice of medicine, would not do it again if they had to do it all over, and would not encourage a young person they know to pursue it.

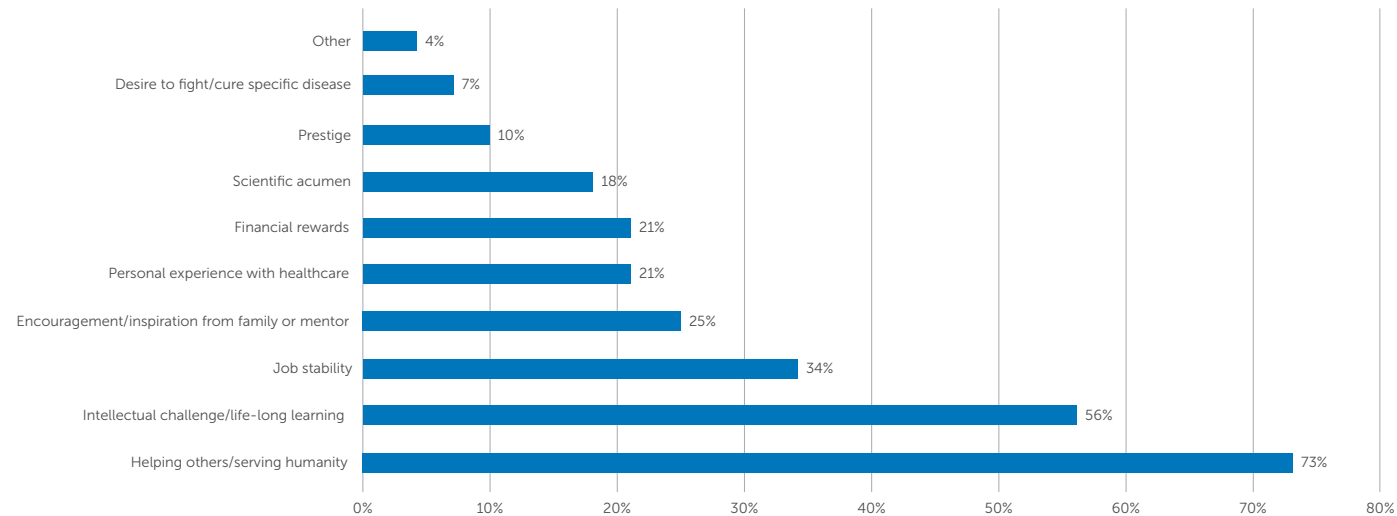


I knew I wanted to be a doctor when a mentor of mine taught my first aid merit badge class in Boy Scouts. That is all I wanted to do after that point.”

MEDICINE AS A CALLING INITIALLY AND HOW IT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME



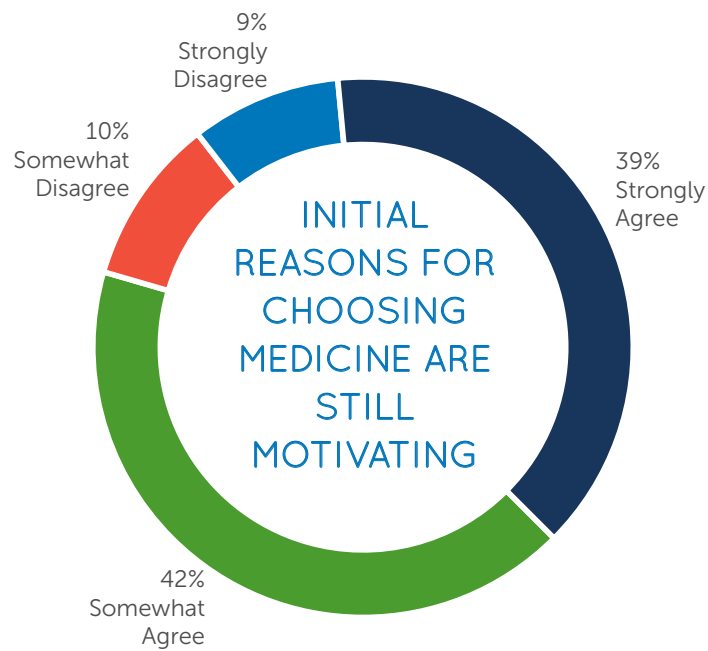
MOTIVATION FOR PURSUING MEDICINE



MOTIVATIONS

Nearly three-fourths of respondents said a desire to help others and serve humanity was a primary motivator for their decision to practice medicine. The second most common motivator was the intellectual challenges and lifelong learning associated with a career in medicine.

One in four of those who said medicine was definitely a calling report that they were motivated by a personal experience with healthcare. Almost half of them (49%) strongly agree that their initial reasons for pursuing medicine still motivate them.



Takeaway:

While the reasons for initially pursuing medicine were largely altruistic and rooted in the desire to serve others and help humanity, many clinicians say their sense of calling, or purpose, has weakened over the years.

Mission in a Moment: WHEN WAS YOUR DECISION TO PURSUE MEDICINE CONFIRMED?

“

I spent a good portion of my childhood as a patient. I really admired one particular nurse and physician who understood [not only] the quality of being a child, but [also one] living with a chronic illness and how to adapt to those lifestyle changes. I wanted to be just like them.”

“

Being a first-generation American, I saw how badly the healthcare system treated poor people and my parents. I knew there was a better way. I wanted to be a part of that change, and bring equity to all communities keeping humanity and compassion at the center.”

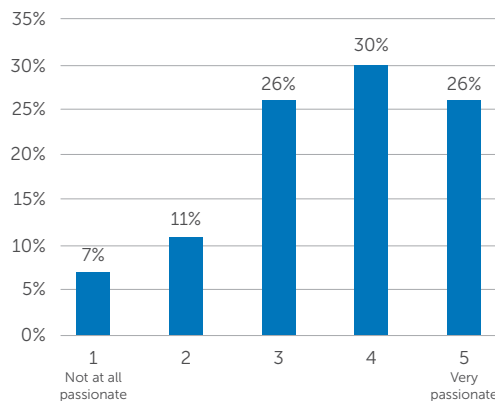
“

As a child, I vividly remember accompanying my mother to her doctor’s appointments. The way the doctor exuded confidence and calm made a lasting impression on both my mother and our family. It was in those moments that I felt a deep desire to become a doctor — someone who could provide that same sense of reassurance and peace. Today, I strive to care for my patients with the same compassion and understanding that my mother experienced during her challenges. Having overcome her own health struggles, she now thrives and takes great joy in watching her daughter care for others. Her resilience inspires me every day, and it is my hope to bring comfort and support to everyone I have the privilege to serve.”

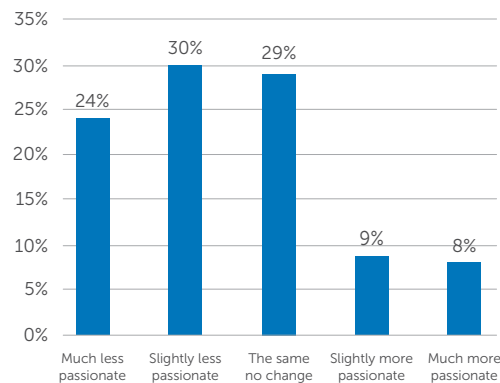
Passion and Purpose

Passion for Practicing Medicine

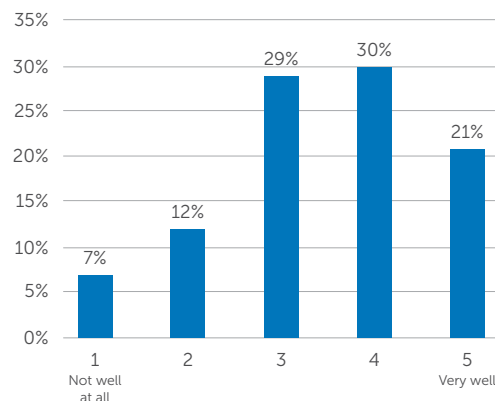
HOW PASSIONATE



HOW HAS PASSION CHANGED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS



HOW WELL ARE YOU ABLE TO LIVE OUT YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE THROUGH YOUR WORK



More than half of respondents rated their passion for medicine as a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. While most say their passion has weakened over the years — likely due to administrative burdens, regulatory changes, productivity quotas, and other challenges — clinicians still feel they are living out their purpose through their work, with 51% rating this 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale.

Takeaway:

Most physicians (4 out of 5) rated their ability to live out their purpose as a 3 or higher on a 5-point scale, reflecting the strength of their convictions that medicine is indeed a calling. Although passion evolves and motivations may shift, these results demonstrate the sentiment that passion and purpose are alive and well among clinicians.

Burnout and Regret

Burnout remains a concern among clinicians and administrators; however, the numbers give reason to be hopeful. More than half of respondents indicated high or fairly high levels of engagement at work, respectively described as “very happy at work; love what I do; feel a sense of joy” and “aspects of day-to-day I don’t enjoy but overall I get to do a job I like.”

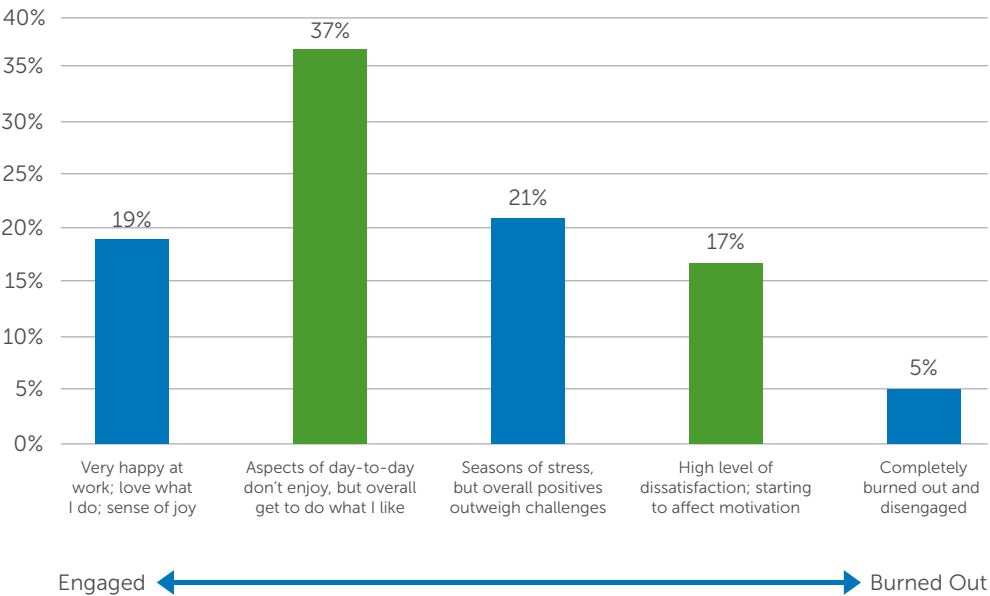
By framing the question in this way, respondents were asked to think about what burnout and engagement look like, rather than simply rating themselves on an arbitrary scale. In doing so, we find that **77% feel the positive outweighs the negative.**

These clinician engagement numbers are better than those of the general public’s career engagement. According to a recent Gallup poll⁴, only 34% of adults feel engaged at work.

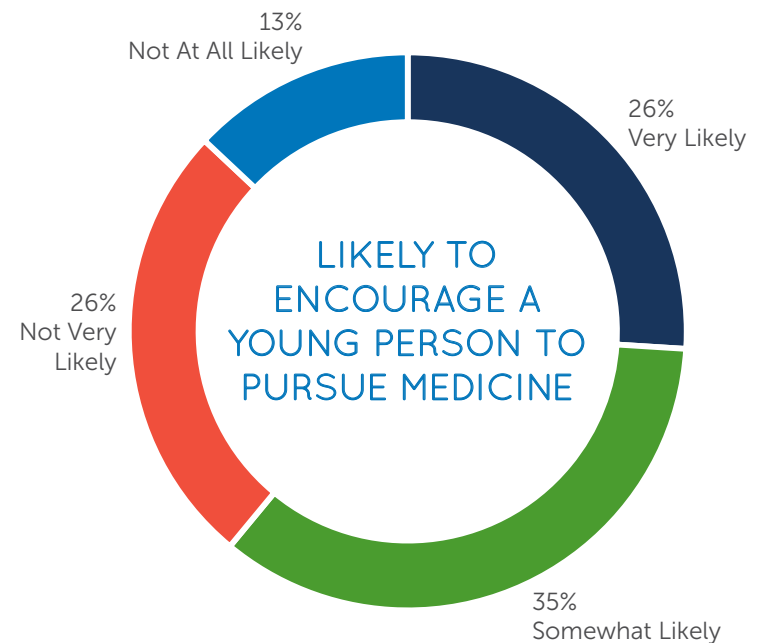
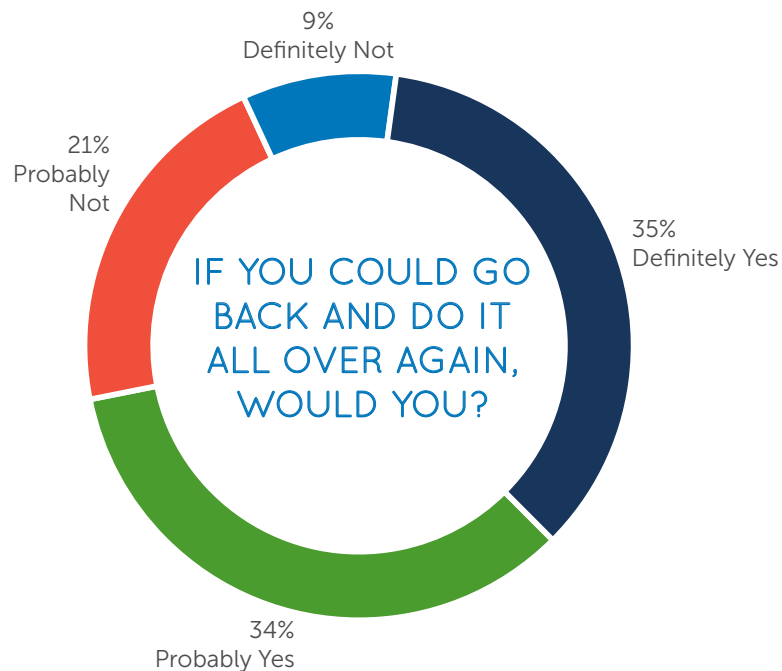
Takeaway:

Burnout is an ongoing concern in the healthcare industry, but clinicians — specifically those who are fueled by a sense of purpose — are more engaged and thus better prepared to meet the day-to-day grievances of the job than the general population. So while we may continue to see headlines and industry conversation about burnout, clinicians overwhelmingly shared that the positives of their jobs outweigh the negatives.

BURNOUT



Highest/lowest engagement	Very happy at work; love what I do; sense of joy	Completely burned out and disengaged
Definitely a calling	24%	4%
Probably a calling	13%	6%
Not really/Not at all a calling	6%	10%



Respondents may still feel a sense of purpose, but one-third are not sure having a meaningful medical career is worth the pain it brings. Approximately one in three respondents said they probably or definitely would not go into medicine if they could do it all over again. An even higher percentage said they were not very likely or not at all likely to recommend a career in medicine to a young person.

Those who say medicine was definitely a calling are more likely to say they have no regrets about their professional choices and would be likely to encourage a young person to pursue medicine.

Takeaway:

A strong sense of calling or purpose tends to inspire greater resiliency in the face of the many challenges that accompany a career in medicine. That's not to say those with a sense of purpose don't also feel beaten down by the system at times, but they are fed by interactions with patients and the knowledge that they are serving their purpose of helping others.

WHAT MADE YOU QUESTION YOUR DECISION TO PURSUE MEDICINE?

“

Medicine is now driven by metrics rather than patient care. As long as the metrics and criteria are met, regardless of what happened to the patient, seems to be the goal rather than personalized patient care.”

“

The workload impacted family life significantly. The “business” of medicine and bureaucracy has only grown and this, with electronic records, occupies too high a proportion of my time compared with direct patient care. The constant push to increase RVUs and billing is demoralizing. Healthcare seems to be controlled by insurance companies and pencil pushers, not MDs.”

“

The healthcare system — from both the lens of a physician and a patient — has exposed significant flaws. They include the insurance barriers that affect our patients’ ability to receive the treatments their health depends on and the physicians’ sense of dread to overcome the multitude of obstacles to ensure they deliver quality care while managing a high census, at the expense of their wellbeing. The systematic barriers and the hospitals’ lack of accountability or mere attempts to fix the problems are unfortunately what drive physicians to question their choices and seek alternate routes like locums, research, side gigs, early retirement, etc.”



Across all respondents, approximately one-third (30%) say they plan to leave their current employers in the next one to three years — a statistic that should raise an alarm among healthcare leaders. Also interesting to note, respondents overall were three times as likely to say they are planning to move from permanent work to locum tenens (12%) than they were to say the reverse (4%). This may be due to a high percentage of Baby Boomers planning to use locum tenens work to transition to retirement, but it could also be a reaction to burnout felt by those in permanent positions.

Career plans in 1–3 years	Definitely a calling	Probably a calling	Not a calling
No plans to change what I do and where I do it	42%	35%	34%
Plan to leave my current workplace	27%	34%	39%
Plan to leave medicine altogether	6%	8%	9%
Plan to go from permanent work to locum tenens	13%	12%	7%
Plan to go from locum tenens to a permanent job	4%	5%	4%

Takeaway:

While turnover is driven by a variety of factors, clinicians who definitely see medicine as a calling are more likely to say they plan to stay with their current employers. Those who do not feel it is a calling are most likely to leave their current workplaces in the next one to three years.



APPs and Physicians

While the majority of the report focuses on clinicians as a whole — encompassing physicians and advanced practice providers — there are differences in their perceptions of medicine as a calling. Advanced practice providers are more likely than physicians to say medicine was definitely a calling (72% vs. 58%) and APPs are slightly more likely to say the feeling has grown stronger (29% vs. 20%). They are more likely than physicians to say helping others was a primary motivator (83% vs. 70%) and to rate their ability to live out their purpose as a 5 on a 5-point scale (30% vs. 18%).

APPs are also more likely to say they would definitely follow the same path if they could go back and do it all again (46% vs. 32%), and 39% are very likely to encourage a young person to pursue medicine.

	APPs	Physicians
Feel medicine was definitely a calling	72%	58%
Motivated by a desire to help others	83%	70%
Passion for medicine 5 on 5-point scale	38%	22%
Ability to live out purpose 5 on 5-point scale	30%	18%
Would definitely do it over again	46%	32%
Would recommend a medical career to young people	39%	21%

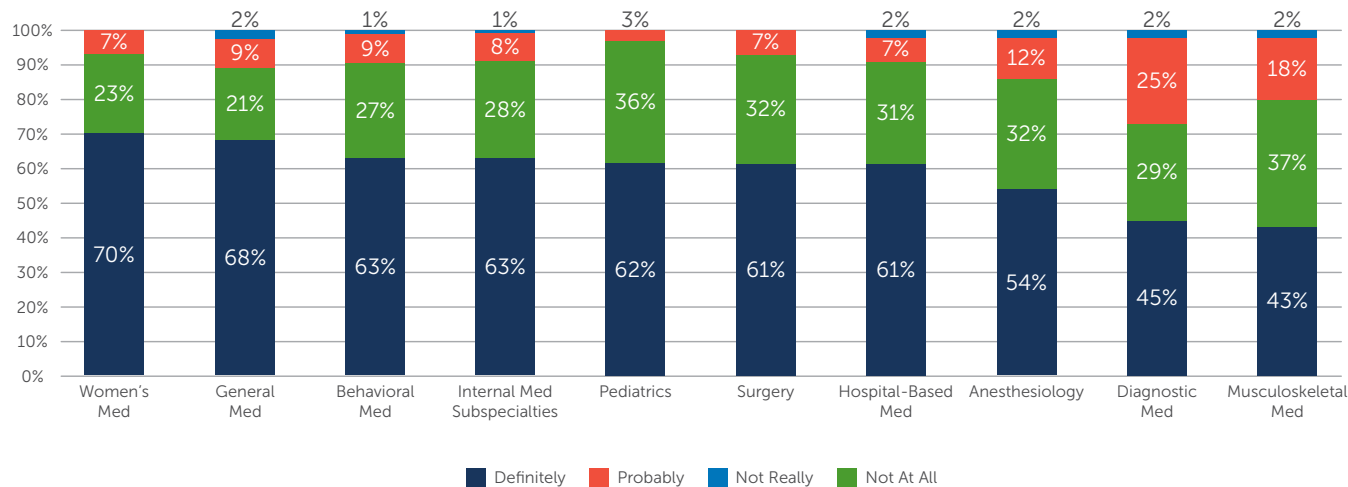
“When I am able to help a patient using my knowledge and skills and they express this to me, it brings me a lot of satisfaction that I am helping in some small way despite the nightmare of a healthcare system that I practice in.”

A photograph of a female doctor with blonde hair, wearing a white lab coat and a stethoscope, leaning forward to talk to a female patient. The patient is sitting and holding a black clipboard, looking at it with a smile. The background is a bright, modern interior with large windows. A green semi-transparent overlay covers the left side of the image, containing the text 'Specialty Insights'.

Specialty Insights

Medical specialties also play a role in the perception of purpose. Those practitioners specializing in women's medicine were most likely to say medicine was definitely a calling (70%). Close behind, 68% of general practitioners said medicine was definitely a calling, followed by 63% of behavioral medicine clinicians and 63% of internal medicine subspecialists. Specialists least likely to say medicine was definitely a calling were diagnostic medicine (45%) and musculoskeletal (43%). These numbers align with a 2018 study⁵ of medical students, in which the study concluded those with a strong sense of medicine as a calling were more likely to pursue primary care residencies.

MEDICINE AS A CALLING: SPECIALTY



Behavioral medicine specialists consistently appear to feel the greatest sense of purpose and satisfaction in their work. They are most likely to rate their passion level a 5, most likely to say they would definitely go into medicine again, and most likely to say they would encourage a young person to go into medicine. On the flip side, musculoskeletal specialties were most likely to rate their passion a 1 or 2 and most likely to say they would not encourage a young person to pursue medicine.

1

Behavioral medicine (32%), general medicine (33%) and pediatrics (31%) are most likely to rate their level of passion at a 5. Musculoskeletal (33%), surgeons (24%) and hospital-based specialists (22%) are most likely to rate it a 1 or 2.

2

Behavioral medicine practitioners (60%) are most likely to rate their ability to live out their life's purpose a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. Musculoskeletal specialists (34%) are most likely to rate it a 1 or a 2 (not well at all or not very well).

3

Behavioral medicine practitioners (44%) are most likely to say they would definitely go into medicine if they had to do it all over again. Anesthesiologists (38%), surgeons (35%) and hospital-based specialists (33%) are most likely to say probably or definitely not.


4

Behavioral medicine (34%) are most likely to say they would be very likely to encourage a young person to pursue medicine as a career. Those working in musculoskeletal (56%), surgical (47%), diagnostic medicine (46%), women's medicine (45%), pediatric (42%) and hospital-based (41%) specialties are most likely to say they would be not very or not at all likely to do so.



Generations and Genders





Baby Boomers are the most likely to report a strong sense of calling and the highest levels of passion for their work. They are also most likely to say they would do it all over again and would encourage a young person to pursue medicine.

Gen Xers were less likely than Baby Boomers to say medicine was definitely a calling (67%), and Millennials (50%) and Gen Z (51%) were both considerably less likely than Gen X to feel this way. The decline in seeing medicine as a calling is somewhat surprising, in that we have generally observed “meaning” to be more important to younger generations. In a Monster.com survey⁶, 74% of Gen Z respondents said purpose was more important than a paycheck, a higher percentage than was reported by the other generations.

While Millennials were more likely than the other generations to be motivated by job security, Gen Z was most likely to be motivated by a desire to serve humanity and help others. Perhaps phrasing it as a “calling” didn’t resonate with the youngest physicians, but they are clearly motivated to serve others, and they are likelier than Millennials and Gen X to say those reasons are still motivating (48%). In fact, Gen Z and Baby Boomers were almost equally likely to say they are very happy and feel joy at work (27% and 28%, respectively).

It’s especially interesting that their engagement levels are so similar considering one group has barely started their careers (all but the oldest members of Gen Z are still in training) and the other is nearing the end of their careers in medicine.

Women are more likely than men to say medicine was definitely a calling (67% vs. 58%). Women are also more likely to say they were motivated by a desire to help others and serve humanity (80% vs. 67%), while men were more likely to say they were motivated by financial rewards (26%) than women (15%).

“

Patients tell me that I’m ‘the last of my kind,’ an old-fashioned physician who listens, cares and partners with them to find the right diagnosis and treatment plan. This makes me happy, but also sad that their experience with others has been so transactional and dissatisfying.”

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Feel medicine was definitely a calling	51%	50%	67%	76%
Motivated by a desire to help others	85%	73%	74%	70%
Passion for medicine 5 on 5-point scale	29%	18%	27%	39%
Ability to live out purpose 5 on 5-point scale	19%	16%	18%	34%
Would definitely do it over again	32%	23%	38%	52%
Would recommend a medical career to young people	25%	17%	27%	39%

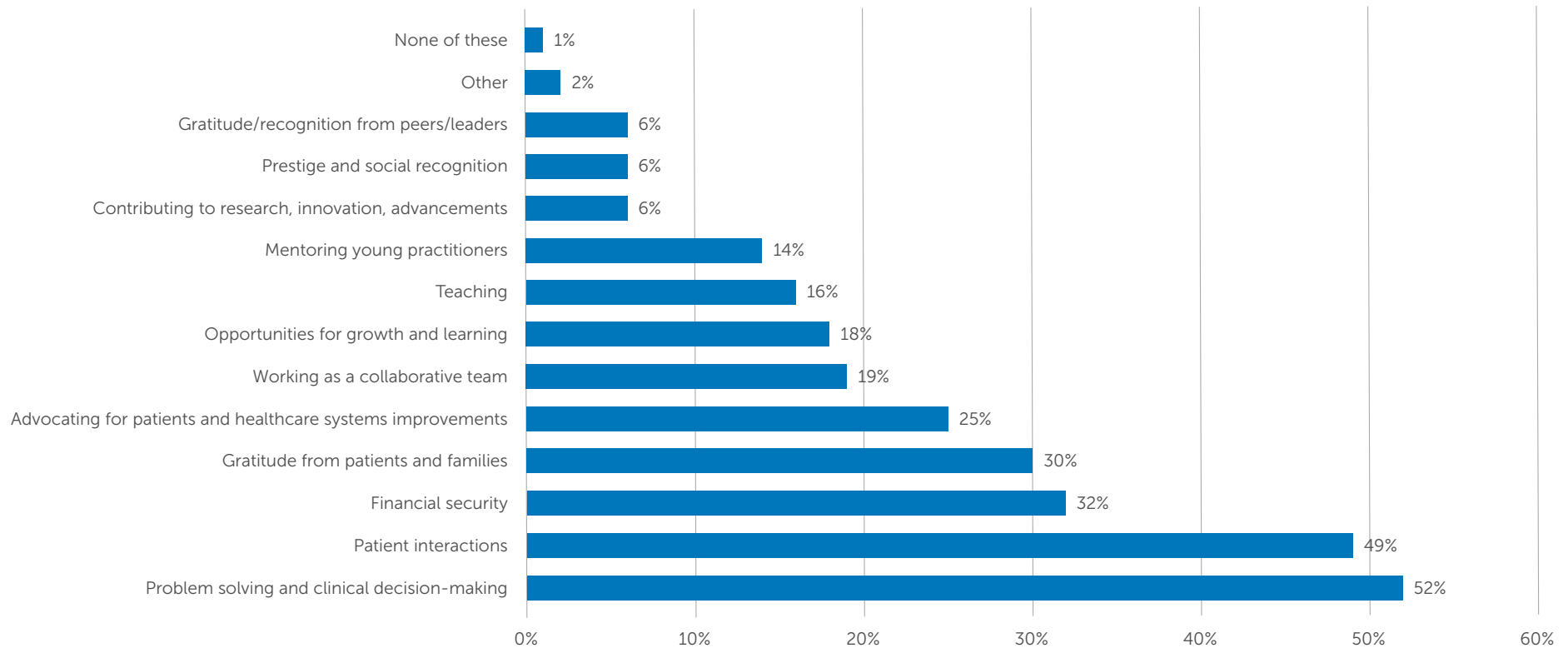
Takeaway:

The oldest generation demonstrates the strongest sense of medicine as a calling, while the youngest were most likely to say they were motivated by a desire to help others. The oldest and youngest reported similarly high engagement levels, with both groups more likely to say they feel joy at work compared to their Millennial and Gen X counterparts.

Reigniting Your Purpose



MOST MEANINGFUL ASPECTS



The data indicates that a strong sense of purpose allows clinicians to feel happier in their jobs, but what if the sense of purpose just isn't there?

Whether that purpose was once there or has dwindled, is there hope for the future of healthcare if a clinician begins to feel like their efforts are pointless?

The research suggests yes. There are actionable steps clinicians can take to rediscover or reignite their purpose. It starts with identifying those aspects of the job that still bring fulfillment — the moments that reinforce why they went into medicine and confirm their decisions. For 52% of clinicians, this happens when problem solving and making clinical decisions. Patient interactions are also meaningful.

The rewards, both financial and expressions of patient gratitude, also hold meaning. But, it seems clinicians — especially those just starting out — often place too much importance on compensation. In a Jackson Physician Search and MGMA survey⁷, 76% of early-career physicians reported that compensation was the primary factor driving their first job decisions. The same study found physicians who completed training in the last six years reported staying in their first jobs for an average of just two years. When the question was asked of all physicians (regardless of how long ago they completed training), the average first job tenure was six years. The trend of shrinking tenure suggests early-career physicians often accept the largest offer but quickly discover that it takes more than money to be happy at work.



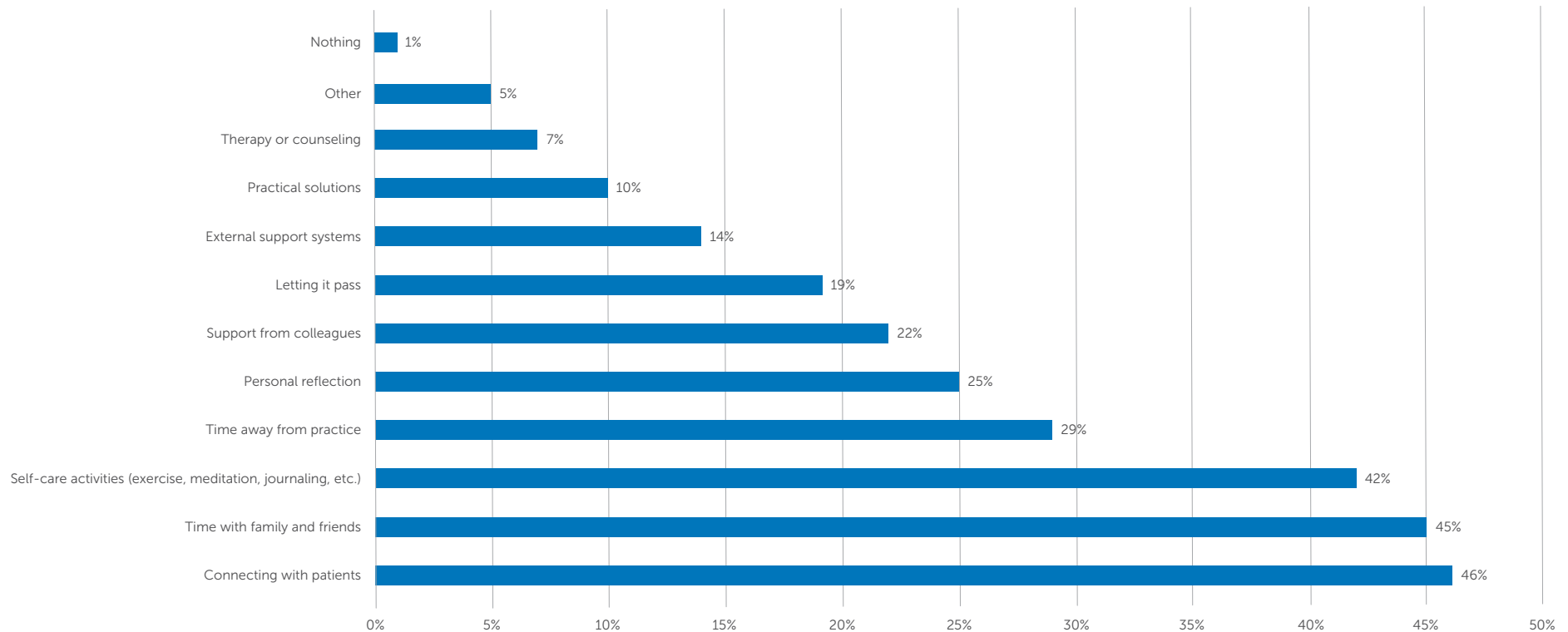
76%

of physicians said
compensation was the
primary factor driving
their first job decisions.

Takeaway:

Clinicians can focus on the tasks and aspects of their job that bring them the most joy, like patient interactions and problem solving, to reignite their passion and bring them joy in the day-to-day activities of their careers. While compensation and financial rewards are important, clinicians who place too much importance on this factor end up changing jobs within a handful of years.

WHAT KEEPS YOU GOING IN CHALLENGING MOMENTS?



What keeps you going in challenging moments?

The world's longest happiness study⁸, started in 1938 and run by a Harvard research team, found the factor with the greatest impact on happiness is relationships. So, perhaps it should come as no surprise that "connecting with patients" is among the most meaningful factors and was the most common answer when asked, "What keeps you going in challenging moments?" The response "Time with family and friends," another relationship-focused answer, was a close second.



"I am with patients at their most vulnerable. Having the connections with patients when they can really be themselves and discuss their precious family dynamics and be open and honest with me."



"Many moments [confirm my sense of calling], probably at least once a month, when you really witness a turning point for a patient. I'm very grateful to be a part of these journeys and that people have entrusted me to be there."



"When I was working locum shifts in a prison infirmary, I was able to make a meaningful connection with an inmate whose life I saved after the prison clinic system had neglected his needs and reasonable requests for years on end. I played some small part in helping him survive long enough to make it home to his family, and after more than 30 years of incarceration, he is now working as a productive member of society, serving his family and rebuilding a life."



Clinicians need connection in order to find meaning in their jobs. Achieving this connection is complicated by increased administrative burdens, productivity requirements, private equity, and the resulting corporatization of medicine.

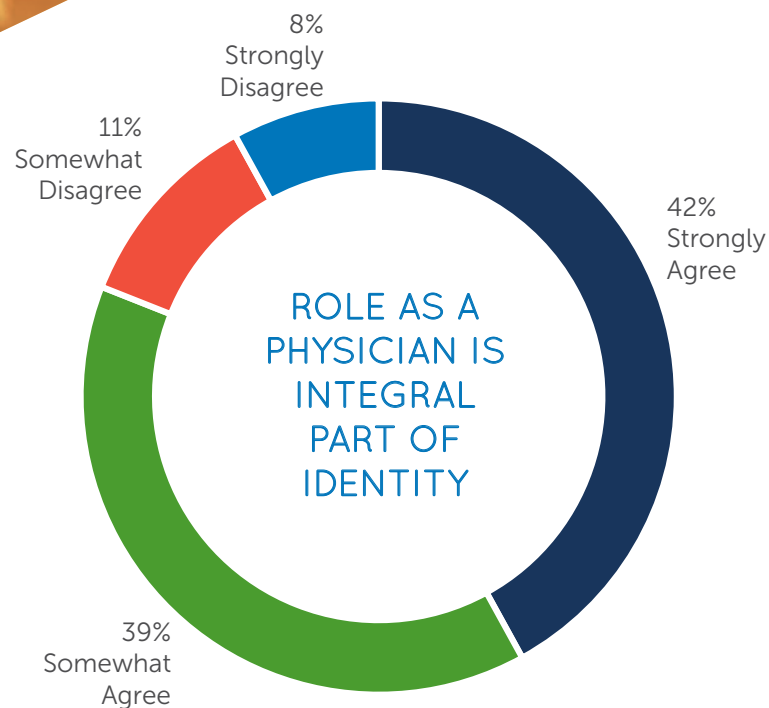
Physicians need adequate time to build relationships with patients, and they also need time away to nurture personal relationships. Both of these could be achieved if administrators can provide the two most common responses to the question, "What could strengthen your ability to live out your life's purpose?" The top answers were "reduced administrative burdens" and "improved work-life balance." The former frees up time to spend with patients, and the latter allows more time to nurture personal relationships.

Another relationship worth fostering is that of mentor and mentee. The data shows Baby Boomers are the most likely to feel a sense of calling and high levels of passion for the work. Thus, it may be wise for members of the younger generations to seek out older mentors and discuss their discouragement. Older physicians who feel a sense of purpose can make an effort to instill a similar sense of calling in the younger generations, encouraging them in challenging moments and reminding them of the wins when they are feeling down.



81%

strongly or somewhat agree that being a clinician is an integral part of their identity.



In the U.S., one's chosen profession is often closely connected to how individuals see themselves, and for clinicians, this is especially true. The research found 81% of respondents strongly or somewhat agree that being a clinician is an integral part of their identity. This is notably higher than the 73% of the general population who said their jobs were extremely or somewhat integral to their identity in a 2023 Pew Research study⁹.

The groups who were most likely to say medicine was a calling — Baby Boomers, behavioral medicine specialists and women’s medicine specialists — were also the most likely to say being a physician is integral to their identity. The exception here is that physicians were more likely than APPs to say their careers are an integral part of their identities. This may explain, in part, physicians’ resistance to the term “healthcare provider.” Calling physicians “providers” doesn’t acknowledge the considerably more education and training required for their roles, and thus takes away a critical piece of what it means to be a physician.

What does it imply that so many clinicians feel their professions are integral to their identities? Anne Wilson, a professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, discusses her extensive work on this topic in an interview with Kate Morgan for BBC.com¹⁰. As access to education increases and a wider variety of professions becomes available, our professional choices trigger assumptions about our income and education status — something those at the upper tiers of both may welcome. However, Wilson cautions against “enmeshment,” when the boundaries between one’s work and personal life blur.

Wilson’s words of warning may be especially relevant to Baby Boomer physicians approaching retirement.



If you tie [your self-worth] to your career, the successes and failures you experience will directly affect your self-worth,” said Wilson. “And because we live in a society where careers are less likely to be lifelong, if we switch or find ourselves out of a job, it can also become an identity crisis.”



Takeaway:

Fears about losing one’s identity may explain why so many physicians continue to work past retirement age. The fact that so many Baby Boomers are still working may be helpful as it relates to the physician shortage, but what does it say about the emotional health of our aging physicians? While meaningful work will inevitably play a role in how we see ourselves, it is important to have an identity outside of our professional selves as well.

The Path to Purpose: Q&A with Shane Jackson

President,
Jackson Healthcare



The role work plays in how we see ourselves is undeniable, and those who see their work as meaningful tend to feel more pride and find more joy in the work itself. In his book, *This is the Thing: About Life, Joy, and Owning Your Purpose*, author Shane Jackson gives readers a framework for discovering and living their unique purpose based on their individual passions, strengths and the legacy they wish to leave.



In your book, you acknowledge the importance of meaningful work as it relates to both purpose and joy. One might assume working in medicine, which touches so many lives, would be extraordinarily satisfying, and yet that is not always the case. Why do you think that is?

The new research from Jackson Physician Search and LocumTenens.com shows that clinicians feel greater purpose and engagement than the general population, and yet, many question whether they would do it all over again. There are many contributing factors, but I'm certain it boils down to the disappointment felt from the difference between what clinicians expected their work to be and the reality of what it has become. Over the past twenty years, physicians overall have experienced a significant decline in the percentage of their time spent with patients as dealing with EMRs and insurance companies takes up more and more time. The parts of the job that feel most meaningful — interacting with patients and solving problems — have been greatly diminished, and that's not what physicians and APPs dreamed of as they endured the rigorous training required to join their professions.



What does waning passion signify about one's purpose?

It's normal for passions to evolve. What we care most about at 25 is likely to be different from what excites us at 45. It's expected that our goals will change as well. We reach one achievement and immediately start striving for the next — medical school, then residency, a first job, a partnership, a leadership role...it goes on and on. The problem is that many of us reach a point in life where we are entrenched in activities that we chose during a time of life when our passions and goals were different than they are today. Understanding our purpose is not a one-time exercise. The path we chose when we were in our 20s may not be the one we desire to keep walking down in our 50s. It is important that we understand how our passions change through time and give ourselves permission to make new choices based on those changes.



How can clinicians be intentional about reconnecting with their purpose?

One of the things I tell people often is that having clarity about your purpose will probably change some of the things you choose to do, but it will definitely change the way you perceive the things you are doing. Understanding what brings us joy in life will help us to choose to do more things that are purposeful, but it can also enable us to choose to see the purpose of even those activities that feel like “have-tos.” Clinicians can hopefully leverage their autonomy to put themselves in a position to do the things they find meaningful and rewarding — like spending time with patients. But they can also reframe all the annoying administrative parts of the jobs as part of the investment they are making in those they serve. It doesn’t make documentation fun, but it does help put it in perspective as part of life’s larger purpose.



What final advice would you give clinicians on connecting with their purpose?

Sick people can’t take care of sick people—only healthy people can do that. We cannot care for others if we aren’t taking care of ourselves. Our communities need physicians and advanced practice providers who are happy and healthy. Imagine what our healthcare systems would look like if all clinicians were doing work that they were passionate about and fully aligned with their purpose. That would change our country. I encourage our clinicians to use their voices and their agency to make sure they are doing meaningful things. Yes, there are annoying, tedious parts of any job, and those will never completely go away. Realize that making choices in your day, week or year that better enable you to live your purpose isn’t a selfish exercise. If our caregivers are living purpose-filled lives, then our patients will be better. You are in a very unique position to impact so many people’s lives — one of the kindest things you can do for yourself and others is to make sure you are living purposely.

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