

Looking Beyond Burnout: Building a Balanced Measurement Approach

One of the most common questions in health-promotion and wellbeing work is: *What should we measure?*

There is no single measure of wellbeing or organizational improvement. Effective continuous improvement relies on multiple sources of information that, when viewed together, help organizations understand whether people are being supported, conditions are improving, and systems are becoming more responsive over time.

Rather than searching for a single "wellbeing score," Faculties of Medicine are encouraged to develop a balanced measurement approach that combines outcome measures, process measures, engagement indicators, and lived experience.

1. Wellbeing and Experience Measures

These measures help track how people are feeling and functioning over time.

Examples may include:

- Burnout
- Professional fulfillment
- PPC Safety
- Sense of belonging
- Moral distress
- Workload perception
- Stress and recovery

What these measures can tell you:

- Whether wellbeing appears to be improving or worsening
- Which groups may be experiencing greater challenges
- Where further exploration may be required

2. Process and Implementation Measures

These measures assess whether improvement efforts are being implemented as intended.

Examples may include:

- Participation in leadership development
- Uptake of wellbeing supports & services
- Use of peer support programs
- Completion of quality improvement initiatives or PDSA cycles
- Availability of protected time
- Progress on planned actions

What these measures can tell you:

- Whether initiatives are being implemented as intended
- Where barriers to implementation may exist
- Whether early improvements are occurring before outcomes change

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3. Engagement Measures

These measures help determine whether improvement efforts feel relevant, accessible, and worthwhile.

Examples may include:

- Survey participation rates
- Attendance at events and initiatives
- Participation in consultations or focus groups
- Involvement in co-design activities
- Utilization of feedback opportunities

What these measures can tell you:

- Whether people trust the process
- Whether initiatives feel relevant and worthwhile
- Whether barriers to participation exist

4. Culture and Learning Environment Measures

These measures assess the organizational conditions that influence wellbeing.

Examples may include:

- Psychological safety
- Respect and inclusion
- Professionalism
- Team functioning
- Learning environment indicators
- Experiences of belonging or exclusion

What these measures can tell you:

- How people experience the learning and work environment
- Whether organizational conditions support wellbeing
- Where systems-level improvement may be needed

5. Qualitative Insight and Lived Experience

Numbers rarely tell the whole story. Qualitative information helps explain why patterns exist and what changes may be most helpful.

Examples may include:

- Focus groups
- Listening sessions
- Open-text survey responses
- Interviews
- Narrative feedback
- Reflective discussions

What these measures can tell you:

- Why challenges may be occurring
- What people are experiencing
- Which solutions may be most meaningful and feasible

Stories help explain the numbers. The strongest evaluation approaches combine both.

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6. Monitoring for Unintended Consequences

Improvement efforts should be evaluated not only for impact, but also for potential burden or unintended effects.

Examples may include:

- Workload implications
- Administrative burden
- Equity impacts across groups
- Participation burden
- Perceptions of performative activity
- Unanticipated barriers created by new initiatives

What these measures can tell you:

- Whether initiatives are creating new challenges
- Whether benefits are being experienced equitably
- Whether improvement efforts remain sustainable over time

Bringing It All Together

No single measure can capture the complexity of a health-promoting learning environment.

Effective continuous improvement relies on multiple, imperfect measures viewed together. Burnout scores, participation rates, culture indicators, implementation measures, and lived experiences each provide part of the picture. Meaningful evaluation comes from interpreting these sources collectively and using them to guide learning, decision-making, and action.

Key Message

The goal is not to create a single wellbeing score. The goal is to understand whether conditions are improving, people are being supported, and systems are becoming more responsive over time.

Further Reading

- Canadian Medical Association [National Physician Health Survey](#)
- Li H, Upreti T, Do V, Goldberg A, et al. [Measuring Wellbeing: A Scoping Review of Metrics and Studies Measuring Medical Student Wellbeing Across Multiple Timepoints](#)