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# Va. nursing homes, assisted living facilities struggle with staffing

## Survey shows facilities need nurses

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 22, 2022 BY KATHERINE SCHULTE

Virginia's nursing homes and assisted living facilities continue to struggle with staffing shortages, according to a Virginia Health Care Association-Virginia Center for Assisted Living survey released in December.

Of 154 long-term care providers who responded to the survey, 86% said their workforce situation worsened in 2022 compared with 2020, an increase of five percentage points from the 2021 survey.



Friendship staff assist a rehab patient. Photo courtesy Friendship

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Joe Hoff, president and CEO of Friendship, which has nursing homes, assisted living facilities, adult day care and independent living across two facilities in Roanoke and one in Salem, needs about 50 to 75 more employees to be fully staffed. Friendship currently has about 650 employees, with about 1,000 residents on average.

“There’s just a critical nursing shortage across the country, but I’d say within the past two years, it’s been a bit harder to find staff,” Hoff said. Although some people who retired or left the workforce during the pandemic are coming back, they aren’t returning to the workforce as fast as they left, he added.

### A persistent problem

Of the facilities surveyed, 93% reported vacancies for certified nursing assistants/direct caregivers, 87% have vacancies for licensed practical nurses and 70% have vacancies for registered nurses.

Tom Orsini, president and CEO of Lake Taylor Transitional Care Hospital in Norfolk, has roughly 400 employees, about 190 of whom are nurses or nursing assistants. The facility has 104 long-term acute care beds and 192 nursing home beds. Orsini needs about 20 more nurses or CNAs and has been using contract nurses in the meantime.

“It’s just the field of people competing for this resource has grown,” said Orsini. “If you’re a nurse, you don’t have to come out and do hands-on nursing. There’s a lot of other opportunities for nurses,” like working in home health, doctors’ offices or labs.

Eighty-two percent of respondents had a shortage of staff to fill all shifts in the 60 days before the survey, which VHCA-VCAL conducted from Sept. 7 to Sept. 30. In those 60 days, 96% of providers said they had asked staff to work overtime or take extra shifts, up from 92% in 2021.

Lake Taylor Transitional Care Hospital has asked staff to work on their scheduled days off, Orsini said, even if they can’t work a full shift that day.

Facilities also had vacancies for dietary staff and housekeeping staff, with 67% reporting the former and 55% reporting the latter. Friendship raised its minimum wage to \$14 an hour to recruit and retain dietary and housekeeping staff, Hoff said.

Part of the difficulty filling nursing positions has been a lack of qualified applicants, survey results show. More than half (55%) of the respondents indicated they had few to no qualified applicants.

Filling open positions takes longer now, Orsini said.

“Before COVID, it could just be just a couple of weeks,” he said. “We’d simply put advertisements in the normal professional advertising websites, and we would get applicants. It would just seem

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that there were more applicants out there.”

But now, the process takes about three to four months. Part of the problem, he said, is that health care facilities are competing with service industries that they didn’t previously have to compete with, like fast food restaurants, which can raise their wages quickly and pass prices on to consumers.

“We can’t do that. We deal with third parties — Medicare, Medicaid and commercial insurance — where rates are already set. So we have to wait till we renegotiate contracts or the new rate year starts,” to raise pay, he said.

### Counteracting workforce challenges

To address these labor shortages, facilities reported taking a number of steps. Almost all (97%) reported they are working to hire new staff. Ninety percent reported increasing pay, and 83% responded that they are offering bonuses for overtime or double shifts. About 55% reporting using contract staff from staffing agencies.

Friendship raised certified nursing assistants’ minimum starting wages from \$15 an hour to \$17 an hour this year, Hoff said.



Friendship employees confer at a nurse station. Photo courtesy Friendship

Friendship has also taken several steps to retain employees, Hoff said, including allowing flexible scheduling. The company also provided a “retention appreciation bonus,” giving each employee an extra \$150 each paycheck for five pay periods, which cost the company around \$350,000 total.

Both Hoff and Orsini reported using contract nurses from staffing agencies while searching for direct hires to fill their vacancies.

“Our goal is to have our own staff, but we’re having to backfill with contract nurses. The care is not as stable as we’d like,” Orsini said.

Both care companies are also working to develop workforce pipelines.

Lake Taylor serves as a clinical site for nursing programs from nearby schools like ECPI University, so students come to the center in rotations.

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“Now that they’ve worked here, and if they like it and they feel comfortable, they’ll come back and apply to work here. They kind of test-drive us a little bit. We test-drive them,” Orsini said.

Usually, about eight to 10 students are in a class, and Lake Taylor will generally hire about four or five from a class, he said.

Friendship also serves as a clinical site for nearby schools like Virginia Western Community College and Radford University. The facilities can host cohorts of about 10 to 15 students at once, and Friendship generally hires one or two students from those cohorts, Hoff said.

Friendship and Lake Taylor are also training employees on-site.

Friendship now trains certified nursing assistants in on-site classes of 10 and pays them while they’re in training. Previously, CNAs had to complete training before receiving pay, Hoff said. If Friendship has more than 10 trainees at a time, the company will place the remaining students in an outside training program.

Lake Taylor runs classes for noncertified nursing assistants, teaching them how to feed patients in an eight-hour course, Orsini said.

### **Lowered admissions**

Because of staffing challenges over the six months prior to the survey’s administration, 42% of respondents limited their number of residents to an amount below full capacity, up from 37% in 2021. Thirty-eight percent reported placing a hold on new admissions (up from 29% in 2021), and 34% reported turning away hospital admissions (up from 26% in 2021).

Lake Taylor sometimes had to slow admissions to or close one of its wings during COVID-19.

Now, “we’re not fully admitting [patients] to all the beds yet,” Orsini said. “We’re taking our time. We’re making sure we’re able to take care of the patients we have and make sure the staff is there as well.”

Friendship has not had to limit admissions, Hoff said, because the company has supplemented nursing staff with agencies, though he hopes to attract and retain enough employees to stop using agencies.

VHCA-VCAL represents more than 350 nursing homes and long-term care facilities in the commonwealth. Its members operate more than 97% of Virginia’s Medicaid nursing facility beds, and six in 10 nursing facility residents rely on Medicaid for their care, according to a news release.

The association is seeking aid from the state: “Virginia’s nursing homes are doing everything

they can to keep their employees, who are the backbone of long-term care,” VHCA-VCAL President and CEO Keith Hare said in a statement. “Now, we’re calling upon Virginia policymakers and members of the General Assembly to make meaningful investments, which will help address key staffing challenges and get seniors access to the 24/7 care they need.”



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# Va. officials woo chip manufacturers

## Billions at stake in hunt to lure semiconductor makers

PUBLISHED AUGUST 27, 2022 BY KATHERINE SCHULTE

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner and state and local economic development officials are vying to attract semiconductor chip manufacturing facilities to four Virginia industrial sites as the commonwealth gears up to fight for a piece of the financial pie from sweeping federal legislation that promises to ramp up chip production in the U.S.

Representatives of Chesterfield, Henrico and Pittsylvania counties and the cities of Chesapeake and Danville joined with Warner, Virginia Economic Development Partnership President and CEO Jason El



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WHERE IS THE SUPPLY CHAIN WHEN YOU NEED IT?

Koubi and Micron Technology Inc.'s senior vice president and general counsel, Rob Beard, Thursday during a meeting at Virginia Commonwealth University to discuss how to make Virginia more competitive. Officials from VCU and Virginia Tech also attended the meeting, which was closed to the press and public.



Sen. Mark Warner receives a tour of the C. Kenneth and Dianne Harris Wright Virginia Microelectronics Center from Hadis Morkoç, Virginia Commonwealth University Founders Professor of Electrical Engineering and Physics. Photo by Katherine Schulte

The meeting coincided with President Joe Biden issuing an executive order Thursday to kickstart the \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act, calling for swift implementation of a component of the bill that provides \$52.7 billion in funding for domestic semiconductor manufacturing and research. Biden's executive order establishes an interagency steering council to coordinate implementation of that funding, co-chaired by National Economic Director Brian Deese, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Alondra Nelson, the acting director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors (CHIPS) and Science Act of 2022 is "a pretty historic piece of legislation that provides not only significant federal funding for semiconductor fabs ... but also provides a number of other funding streams to enhance U.S. capabilities in the industry, including research," El Koubi said.

It was initially introduced in 2020 in an earlier form by Warner, Virginia's Democratic senior senator, and Texas Republican Sen. John Cornyn; the act was passed by Congress this summer and Biden signed it into law on Aug. 9.

According to the Semiconductor Industry Association, the U.S.'s share of global semiconductor manufacturing capacity has decreased from 37% in 1990 to 12% today because other nations have been outpacing the U.S. in investing in the industry.

As chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Warner has been outspoken about the need for domestic chip manufacturing. It's a refrain he returned to Thursday as he toured labs at VCU's C. Kenneth and Dianne Harris Wright Virginia Microelectronics Center.

"We've seen over the last 30 years, America dominated this industry to now ... we only make about 12%," Warner said. "And America, on the manufacturing side, we don't make any of the cutting-edge chips."

#### 'In the hunt'

Several sites in Virginia offer the space needed for the potential manufacture of semiconductors, which can require up to 1,000 acres, Warner said. A likely location for a new plant could be found

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in rural Southern or Southwestern Virginia.

Pittsylvania County's Southern Virginia Megasite at Berry Hill is one of three already established industrial megasites in Virginia. The Danville-Pittsylvania Regional Industrial Facility Authority owns the 3,528-acre site, of which about 1,900 acres are developable. The Berry Hill megasite lost to Savannah, Georgia, in its bid to attract Hyundai Motor Co.'s new \$5.5 billion electric vehicle plant, which would have added about 8,100 jobs.

The Berry Hill megasite has power, water, natural gas and other necessary infrastructure in place, and could support 1.2 gigawatts of power in four to five years, said Pittsylvania Economic Development Director Matthew Rowe. Based on experience working with site consultants, those attributes make the site competitive for attracting semiconductor manufacturing operations. "It really comes down to availability of power, availability of water and then, frankly, demonstrating that the activity is not going to be impacted negatively by rail traffic or vibration, because the equipment is so sensitive," Rowe added.

Henrico County's White Oak Technology Park was previously home to a 1 million-square-foot chip manufacturing facility that was closed by Qimonda AG in 2009. It now is home to a QTS data center, and Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook) has a 2 million-square-foot data center on the site, which has 500 shovel-ready acres.

"We're absolutely in the hunt, talking to prospects and excited about what might come," Henrico Economic Development Association Executive Director Anthony Romanello said, adding, "We've been in conversations for quite some time, well before the CHIPS Act was passed, but the CHIPS Act we hope is really going to be the tipping point."

More recently, Intel Corp. considered Chesterfield County's Upper Magnolia Green site for a \$20 billion, 100-acre facility, but Intel ultimately choose Ohio instead, forging that state's largest-ever economic development deal.

"Even though we made it to the final list [for Intel], we're continuing to develop the site in accordance with the requests that they had to build their [semiconductor fabrication] plant," said Chesterfield Economic Development Director Garrett Hart.

Upper Magnolia Green is 1,728 acres, of which about 1,000 are available for development but not shovel-ready.

"If we develop a site capable of taking [Intel], then everybody else in the business, we should be able to accommodate," Hart added.

Chesapeake's Coastal Virginia Commerce Park could also be a contender, according to a





semiconductor proposition presentation El Koubi made during Thursday's meeting that he provided to Virginia Business. The park, which also appears on VEDP's site selection database, has electric, water, sewer and broadband utilities in place, but not natural gas.

### **Raising the bar**

While there may be shovel-ready sites to lure manufacturers, those locations alone might not be enough.

New York, Texas, Arizona and Ohio have "really raised the bar in going after semiconductors," Romanello said.

To compete, Virginia needs to offer greater incentives.

"One of the things I think Virginia is going to need to do is both have sites prepared but also be willing to put more resources into these packages if we're going to be competitive," Warner said, citing New York's [corporate subsidy of up to \\$10 billion in tax credits](#) for "green" semiconductor manufacturers over a 20-year period, enacted on Aug. 11, among other states' incentives.

Every deal is also going to be different.

"We can structure our incentive packages in a way that is both competitive and that mitigates financial risk to the commonwealth," El Koubi said.

Pittsylvania's Rowe said that Virginia incentives tend to focus on longer-term, performance-based metrics, while "in many states ... they tend to just be much more aggressive in those funds up front, for very well-known, name-brand entities that they feel have very low risk factors."

For example, [Georgia gave Hyundai an incentives and tax break package worth \\$1.8 billion](#) to locate its first EV manufacturing plant in Savannah.

"You may go to other states and they might offer you more money at a local level up front, but the reason they're doing that is because they're just trying to catch up to where we already are," said Rowe, who notes that Pittsylvania County and Danville received more than \$290 million from state and local governments and workforce programs to develop its Virginia Megasite.

Henrico County uses a performance-based model when it considers making offers.

"The company says they're going to do something, they do something, and we verify it and they get the incentive," Romanello said. "We don't do upfront incentives because we don't want to put taxpayer money at risk. ... I think we offer very attractive packages."

### **Looking ahead**

Beyond attracting the major chip manufacturers, officials told Virginia Business they're looking at the entire semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem, which includes the supply chain for components and related materials. And that provides even more opportunities, El Koubi said.

"We are both looking at opportunities for Virginia to attract the semiconductor [fabrication] opportunities themselves for large semiconductor plants, but we're also looking at ways to cultivate the ecosystem, building on Virginia's existing strengths in the semiconductor space," he said.

Those strengths include close to 30 companies in the semiconductor industry — providing production, equipment testing, construction and other services — and an advanced manufacturing and related industries workforce numbering almost 350,000.

Warner wants to see Virginia increase its capacity to manufacture the tools and equipment that go onto the "fab floors." That's a niche that has not yet been co-opted by Asian countries that otherwise dominate the semiconductor industry.

The state also boasts several universities with clean rooms — engineered spaces that offer isolated, controlled environments for working on semiconductors. In order of largest to smallest clean rooms, these include spaces at the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Tech and George Mason University.

Norfolk State unveiled its 6,000-square-foot Micron-NSU Nanofabrication Cleanroom last October, and this summer, the school became the first historically Black college or university to host one of the Idaho-based semiconductor manufacturer's "Chip Camps," a summer STEM program for rising eighth- and ninth-graders.

Micron is [expanding its Manassas facility](#), a \$3 billion economic development deal that may be the largest in state history (depending on Amazon.com Inc.'s investment on its HQ2 headquarters). Micron is expected to create 1,100 additional jobs at the Manassas plant, bringing its workforce there to about 2,600 employees. On Aug. 9, the same day Biden signed the chips legislation, [Micron](#) announced it would invest \$40 billion through the end of the decade to build manufacturing facilities in the U.S. The company plans to announce sites in the coming weeks but is keeping a tight lid on its search.

"I can't comment on the process that we use as part of our site selection process, but Virginia historically has been a great place for us to operate," said Beard, Micron's general counsel. "We're really happy with all of the people that we've worked with here."

*M.J. McAteer contributed to this story.*



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# Running on empty

Health care professionals struggle with stress, burnout

by Katherine Schulte

First, doctors say they're sorry for calling.

Dr. Allison Cotton, a psychiatrist in Reno, Nevada, co-founded the national Physician Support Line in March 2020 to provide peer mental health support to physicians. She says their impulse to apologize shows the need for the service.

"They're apologizing for using a resource which is literally created for them because somebody else might need it more than them," she explains.

During the COVID-19 pandemic's early days, doctors called about feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, which later evolved into sorrow over losing patients.

"When I take calls, a lot of the comments that I hear are things like, 'I don't think I can take losing another patient,'" Cotton says. "The ruminating thoughts that they have are things like holding people's hands while they die alone, having to then tell the families, over and over and over again."

Another thing Cotton has heard "numerous times" she says, "is having husband, wife and adult child all in the ICU altogether, and then they all just are gone, so watching generations of families pass away."

Now, she gets more calls from people who are leaving medicine and are heartbroken about it.

Health care professionals in Virginia have experienced the same pain and stress. The pandemic exacerbated the existing burnout problem in health care, which in turn worsened the labor shortage as people left the industry for lower-stress jobs. Health care systems rushed to respond, implementing wellness programs and peer support groups, as well as offering counseling to employees.

"We can't be all that we want to be to everybody," says Dr. Sandy Simons, who,

prior to the pandemic, in 2015, sought treatment for depression. An emergency medicine practitioner at Bon Secours' Richmond Community Hospital, Simons was featured on the cover of Virginia Business' July 2020 issue for a story about front-line health care workers in the pandemic.

Having previously established boundaries between her work and personal lives, Simons was able to appreciate her contributions during the pandemic. She feels that physicians can compartmentalize well.

"We're generally, for better or for worse, pretty good at turning it off when we come home," she says. "But I think for me the big thing in the pandemic was that when I came home, you didn't have all of the ways that you typically decompress: the gym and seeing friends and seeing family."

Health systems recognize their employees' struggles.

"They've been running a marathon like it's a 40-yard sprint," says Paul Hudgins, senior vice president and chief human resources officer for Roanoke-based Carilion Clinic. "Like other health care organizations' staff ... they're tired and fatigued, and they've done an incredible job self-sacrificing in many ways during this entire pandemic."

Medscape's Physician Burnout & Depression Report 2022 found that 47% of physicians said they felt burnt out in their jobs in 2021, up from 42% in 2020. A March 2021 study published in the Journal of Advanced Nursing found that 34% of nearly 19,000 nurses studied were experiencing emotional exhaustion because of the pandemic.

Cotton says that doctors calling the hotline have expressed shifting emotions and frustrations, including a sense of personal failure and anger at their hospitals, politicians and even themselves "for any number



of things — for not setting better boundaries, for neglecting [their] children and living away from them for six months."

Instead of "burnout," some doctors including Cotton, prefer the term "moral injury," referring to instances when a workplace asks employees to oppose their values, such as requiring them to spend an unreasonable amount of time away from their families.

The problem of physicians' stress gained national attention following the suicide of Dr. Lorna M. Breen, who killed herself in April 2020 at her family's Charlottesville home.



Scott Austin, nurse manager of the UVA Health COVID unit, sought wellness training for his team in 2020.

The head of emergency medical services for several New York-Presbyterian system campuses in New York City, Breen “was a victim of this guilt that you feel when you can’t see more patients, you can’t work another hour, you can’t go another 10 minutes without eating or using the restroom,” Cotton says. “My personal belief is that this moral injury contributed to her ultimate suicide.”

### **Stigma and silence**

Health care professionals face a deep-rooted professional stigma against seeking help for — let alone discussing — their mental health struggles.

“There is a culture in medicine of ‘It’s not about you anymore.’ ... There is a shared understanding that as a physician, you will make sacrifices so that your patients get the best treatment possible,” Cotton explains, including missing significant family events or otherwise straining personal relationships.

About 20% of physicians reported to Medscape that they worried they would be shunned by colleagues if they sought help for depression, and 43% of physicians said they would not seek help for depression for fear someone would disclose it to the medical board.

State medical license applications often ask whether the applicant has sought treatment for a mental illness. In Virginia, applicants must disclose whether they currently have a mental health condition that affects their abilities to perform the obligations and responsibilities of their professional practice safely and competently.

Consequentially, many Virginia physicians falsely assumed that if they sought help for a mental illness, a therapist or colleague might be legally compelled to report them to the state board, says Clark Barrineau, the Medical Society of Virginia’s assistant vice president of government affairs and health policy.

“Rather than seek that help, and particularly put that risk on themselves, they said, ‘I just won’t,’” Barrineau says.

In September 2021, the Virginia Board of Medicine released a brief meant to dispel that misconception, telling doctors, “Get help if you need it.” Practitioners aren’t required to self-report.

### Wellness focus

Along with increasing pay and benefits — including parental leave — to combat the existing labor shortage, health systems in Virginia have fortified employee assistance and wellness programs.

“We really feel that having the right culture is the best way to retain staff and attract staff,” says Toni Ardabell, chief of clinical enterprise operations for Inova Health System.

Bon Secours, Carilion Clinic, Inova and Sentara Healthcare offer emergency assistance funds for employees in need. Virginia Commonwealth University Health

offers crisis packages that, depending on an employee’s needs, can range from child care assistance to temporary housing.

Sentara placed employee assistance program counselors into its hospitals so that they are accessible to employees and can connect providers to free counseling for stress management, caregiver fatigue and more. Carilion Clinic has also increased its number of EAP counselors.

Pediatric emergency director Dr. Lisa Uherick developed Carilion’s “Healthy People Heal People” initiative, implemented in October 2020, which boosts the system’s emergency medicine team with supports like wellness workshops and an “adopt a front-line team” program.

Prior to the pandemic, Bon Secours was already offering employee wellness programs, like LifeMatters, a 24/7 program providing resources such as confidential counseling, legal and financial consultations. In May 2021, the system launched Called to Shine, an employee recognition program.

Supervisors award employees points that can be redeemed for items varying from T-shirts to NFL game tickets.

“It’s really about that teamwork, collaboration and making people feel like we’re giving them something different and we’re a family,” says Cassie Lewis, chief nursing and quality officer for Bon Secours’ Hampton Roads market.

Inova employees make rounds with a “thank you cart” with goodies for clinical staff. Both Inova and Bon Secours offer quiet spaces for employees to take breaks, and several health systems now have mobile apps to help employees build resiliency to stress. At VCU Health, therapy dogs sometimes pay a visit.

### Peer support

Aside from apps and formal programs, peer support has also become important at Virginia health systems.

In May 2020, Bon Secours started Caring for Colleagues, a confidential peer support group for physicians and advanced practice clinicians that allows a participant to call or text a volunteer. Carilion’s Healthy People Heal People program includes peer support groups, and VCU Health expanded its Stress First Aid training systemwide in February 2021.

UVA Health combined existing trainings in 2017 to form its Wisdom & Wellbeing program, which teaches resiliency skills, works to reduce unnecessary work stressors and provides Stress First Aid training.

“We can’t just say, ‘Suck it up and go back to work’ anymore,” says Scott Austin, nurse manager of the UVA Health COVID-19 unit. “We can’t just keep saying that to health care workers.”

During summer 2020, Austin contacted a Wisdom & Wellbeing co-founder. In addition to ever-changing COVID protocols, his nurses faced significantly increased workloads as other staff stayed out of the unit.

“They went from just being bedside nurses, doing their assessments and giving medications and being there for the patients, to adding in being housekeepers, being dietary folks, being phlebotomists,” he says. One technique Austin learned is texting his nurses to gather, pause and talk about their feelings when they’re in the “orange” on the system’s stress continuum, which ranges from green to red.



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During 2020 and 2021, Austin saw more than 10 nurses leave his unit, although not all exited purely in response to COVID-related stressors. As of April, no nurses had left the unit this year, an outcome he attributes to the Wisdom & Wellbeing program.

### Grief counseling

In addition to other well-being efforts and programs, some Virginia health systems have added bereavement support for health care workers who have lost loved ones or patients. Bon Secours, a Catholic-affiliated health system, has clergy circulating on “compassion rounds,” and UVA Health’s chaplaincy is open 24/7. Carilion has chaplains on call who can be paged to arrive within 30 minutes to assist caregivers.

In 2021, Inova hired more behavioral health nurse practitioners for debriefs after units faced difficult issues, like someone bringing a weapon into a hospital.

Health care professionals face vitriol from upset patients. One study published in the American Association of Occupational Health Nursing Inc.’s journal in August 2021 found that 51.2% of registered nurses surveyed who cared for COVID patients experienced physical violence at least once, and 73% experienced verbal abuse.

Although the pandemic jumpstarted these programs and raised public awareness, the shift in culture among health care professionals has been slow to spark. Health care professionals are reluctant to talk publicly about the mental health help they’ve received.

“I think it is going to be kind of a generational shift,” Barrineau acknowledges. “A lot of those things are built in almost culturally to the medical profession.”

Students and residents are part of the change. VCU Health extended benefits such as caregiver leave to its residents during the pandemic, and Inova has had student wellness representatives for several years.

Bon Secours’ Simons says she disclosed to her current employer that she takes an antidepressant medication.

“I did it on my own, but I hope that in today’s environment, people feel more comfortable reaching out to colleagues or to their hospitals,” she says, “because at the end of the day, [there are] good people in health care.” ■

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