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December 6, 2021

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
731 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow,

The Society of Hospital Medicine (SHM), representing the nation's hospitalists, is pleased to offer our support of the effort to designate September 17th as National Physician Suicide Awareness Day.

Hospitalists are front-line clinicians in America's acute care hospitals and focus on the general medical care of hospitalized patients. As a result, our members have been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic caring for patients. While the issue of physician wellness long precedes the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been compounded by the added physical health risks and mental and emotional stressors of caring for patients with COVID. In addition to the obvious physical health risks, hospitalists face significant mental and emotional stress caring for COVID patients. On top of working exceedingly long hours and more shifts due to high volumes and provider shortages, many hospitalists have experienced the loss of several patients in a single shift. While the loss of a single patient under ordinary circumstances is difficult, this scale of loss takes an unprecedented toll on those whose primary professional and personal goals are to help and heal people.

The pandemic has greatly exacerbated the previously high rates of physician burnout, stress, and trauma. According to a Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll, six in 10 health workers reported pandemic stress had harmed their mental health, three in 10 had considered leaving health care, and more than 50 percent said they are burned out. Despite these sobering statistics, clinicians face stigma, structural impediments, and cultural barriers to access care and seek help for their mental health challenges.

SHM is proud to support the resolution that recognizes September 17<sup>th</sup> as "National Physician Suicide Awareness Day" to raise awareness, reduce the stigma of mental health issues, and promote a national discussion about physician suicide. This resolution is an important first step in addressing the crisis of physician suicide and burnout.

Thank you for raising awareness on such an important issue.



Sincerely,

Jerome Siy, MD, MHA, SFHM

President, Society of Hospital Medicine

