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Arizona State Legislature Champions Physician Well-being

May 11, 2022 (Phoenix) — Today, the **Arizona Medical Association (ArMA)** celebrates the passage of **HB2429**, which passed the Arizona State Legislature with nearly unanimous support and was promptly signed by Governor Doug Ducey. This landmark legislation supports the well-being of our physicians and nurses by encouraging the timely seeking of mental health care.

“Addressing the systematic causes of medical professionals’ hesitation to seek timely and appropriate treatment for mental health is a priority for our organization,” expressed ArMA’s President, Jennifer Hartmark-Hill, MD. “HB2429’s passage is a significant milestone in the physician community’s efforts. The protections it offers will help to remove barriers so that our health care colleagues can rightly prioritize their mental well-being as part of overall health. This ArMA-led legislation was one of several initiatives championed by the organization that prioritizes the well-being of our healthcare community.”

Made possible through productive alliances and coordinated collaboration, ArMA’s signature legislation received broad support from community stakeholders, including Arizona’s hospitals, the business community, and the Arizona Nurses Association (AzNA).

Even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout was a significant challenge for health care professionals. The obstacles of the past two years elevated the crisis to unprecedented levels and magnified the suffering of those on the frontline of health care. While many made concerted efforts to improve well-being in the medical field, health care professionals have continued to forgo treatment out of the fear of professional repercussions.

“While prioritizing our patient’s health and well-being, physicians have always quietly carried the burdens of stress, anxiety, and burnout,” remarked Representative Amish Shah, MD, sponsor of HB2429. “Far too many have suffered in silence out of fear of the professional stigma that persists around seeking help for mental health. HB2429 takes a decisive step in the right direction to promote mental and behavioral health within our community.”

HB2429's enactment is a key component of ArMA's larger effort to destigmatize mental health treatment in the medical community. Recently, ArMA and twenty-one other physician-led organizations successfully advocated for **major language changes** within the Arizona Medical Board's (AMB) physician licensure process. The former licensure questions encouraged stigma surrounding mental health treatment, were outdated, and ineffective.

Additionally, ArMA supports the physician community through our **Virtual Doctors' Lounge**, a peer-support program made possible by a partnership with the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). A resource for all Arizona physicians and physicians-in-training, the Virtual Doctors' Lounge pairs participants with a peer who can help alleviate stress and provide the support needed to promote well-being and life balance.

In conjunction with the recent physician licensure language change and ArMA's peer-support program, HB2429 sends a clear message to the physician community that seeking timely mental health treatment is prudent and in the best interest of physicians and their patients.