ideals so that students are able to manage the demands of the profession, while embracing both wellness and professionalism. Analyzing this case through a flourishing lens exposes the student’s choice to prioritize some domains to the detriment of others. The student chose to focus on their own happiness and close social relationships by spending time with friends. However, this choice sacrificed both character/virtue and meaning/purpose. The former was done through intentional deception, the latter from deciding to avoid work in a profession they presumably chose as part of a fulfilled life. The action also potentially jeopardizes other relationships and overall life satisfaction. Had the student chosen to engage in their work, they still could have seen their friends afterwards, albeit later than preferred. Nonetheless, that choice would have promoted all domains of flourishing. Likewise, had the student approached their medical team with their wellness concerns (promoting bravery and prudence), the team could work together to find a solution promoting student well-being while maintaining professionalism, also promoting all 5 domains.

Many medical schools have instituted programming and policies to address the higher prevalence of depression, distress, and overall poor mental health seen in medical students compared with same-aged peers (6). These programs vary in what they offer, although they commonly include social activities, exercise programs, and access to mental health specialists. Some schools even have policies providing wellness days or wellness time. The former are limited days available for students to use at their own discretion, generally in addition to days off students would have for their clerkships. The latter is seemingly less common and is recurring, protected time built into the students’ schedule. At our institution, for example, students have an afternoon off each week for wellness. Some studies have noted benefits of techniques and skills that are taught in wellness programs (7). But it may come as no surprise that students commonly presume that their wellness would improve with more time off; however, literature has yet to confirm this. In fact, studies note that wellness is not proportional to extra days off but is more dependent on how free time is utilized (8). It begs the question: Is more time off just more time off?

True flourishing is more than additional time off. It is a product of a holistic approach incorporating virtue, purpose, and community. It is not possible to truly flourish if one’s choices directly conflict with any of the 5 domains.

Our institution is amid a curricular redesign in which student flourishing is deliberately considered a central goal. This redesign has implemented longitudinal learning communities as a central unit of the educational experience, meant to promote close social relationships. It has reorganized and highlighted (and in some instances created) curricula specifically addressing character and
virtue as well as physical and mental health. There is also dedicated time for reflection and discussion on one’s own meaning, purpose, and life satisfaction. Although these are not novel concepts in medical education, situating them in a balanced flourishing framework that emphasizes character and virtue is. The hope is to create a culture where students do not feel they have to choose between wellness and professionalism, because both are necessary in health care.

Medicine has undoubtedly evolved over the years. New generations with new ideology made way for what is now the beginning of a cultural shift, with some desired and some unexpected changes. Ultimately, in this era of wellness, we make the case for flourishing.

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the U.S. government.

Disclosures: Authors have reported no disclosures of interest. Forms can be viewed at www.acponline.org/authors/icmje/ConflictOfInterestForms.do?msNum=M23-0907.

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