

DEPRESSION RESPECTS NO

intellectual, economic or cultural boundaries. It strikes our students and accomplished physicians. Too often those affected wage a private battle with depression — in silence, out of fear of what those around them might think.

The power of stigma is not absolute, but it can be a tremendous barrier to getting individuals the mental health treatment they need. When those people are themselves physicians or future physicians, the fears are not only for the present, but also the future: What would my attending think? Would my peers consider me less of a physician?

Will my career be derailed if someone finds out? While most physicians treat depressed patients effectively and with compassion, our medical culture — just like the larger American culture of which it is part — fosters a complicit silence about their own mental health, a silence born of stigma.

The Berlin Wall of mental health, stigma will be broken down only as the culture that nurtures it changes. As we know with so many physical disorders, treatments can allow patients to lead normal, productive lives. We must continue to extend this realization to mental health as well, and further to recognize that physicians, for all their healing abilities and medical expertise, are in the end every bit as human, vulnerable — and treatable — as the patients they care for every day.

Sincerely,



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