

With the information provided in mind, develop an essay educating youth how to take care of themselves first, in order to be available to take care of others. Be sure to include specific examples from your own health science education and training. (Formatting is not judged in online submissions)

In the world of healthcare, there are a lot of sayings or catchphrases that get tossed around. Many people know of "do no harm" or "greatest good for the greatest number", but there is another saying that is equally important: "rescuer safety first". In emergency medicine, this means making sure to put on gloves and a mask before approaching the scene of an accident. In nursing, this means maintaining proper lifting technique when caring for patients so you don't hurt your back. But for every field, "rescuer safety first" means taking care of your mental health. If you are unable to take care of your own wellbeing, how can you be expected to care for others? As such, future health professionals must be able to take care of their own mental health by knowing your limits, taking breaks, and getting help as soon as you need it. Everyone has their limits. Not everyone is equipped for the intense, quick paced work of emergency medicine. Not everyone is prepared to care for the daily needs of elderly patients for months on end. Not everyone is capable of keeping young kids entertained as they undergo chemotherapy. Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, and they have to be able to work with them. As such future health professionals have to know what field they are actually capable of working in. This may seem like an obvious fact, but far too often people make it through med school with the goal of working at a high-paying job without considering if they are equipped for it. This can lead to healthcare workers who are ill-equipped for their job who have to keep working in order to pay off student loan debts. Such a prospect is far too stressful and mentally taxing for any individual to deal with. As such, med students must base their future career on their own capabilities, not on how well it pays. Once you are well acquainted with your limits, it's important to be able to take breaks when needed. No one can work for 24 hours on end, day after day and expect to be capable of giving high-quality care the entire time. When healthcare personnel are overworked, accidents happen. The Libby Zion Law was created for that very reason. It's named after Libby Zion, a young girl who unfortunately died because the staff in the hospital were so tired from working incredibly long shifts that they misdiagnosed her illness and didn't catch it before it was too late. To prevent such accidents from happening again, the law was created to limit the number of hours that healthcare personnel can work in a week. That law is a great step forward towards protecting the lives of patients and the wellbeing of healthcare workers, but sometimes it isn't enough. If ever you feel that your ability to care for your patients isn't as great as it should be, then you need to be able to recognize that you need a break. Communicating with your supervisors that you need to take care of yourself so you don't harm your patients should always be a priority. If it isn't a priority, then accidents will happen like they did for Libby Zion. Of course, we can't talk about mental health in healthcare without mentioning some of the scariest statistics. Healthcare workers have some of the highest rates of suicide out of any field. High stress coupled with very little time to spend with family and friends can lead many people down a dark path where they believe there is no hope. As much as that may appear to be the case, it is not true. There are hotlines out there to support those who are contemplating suicide. There are therapists who specialize in caring for healthcare workers. There are so many resources that are available to those who need it. All they have to do is seek it out. It is ok to not be ok, but you need to put in the effort to make your situation better. You need to put your own wellbeing first at all times if you want to be successful in healthcare. If ever you feel that you need help or you see a coworker that needs help, don't be afraid to reach out. It could very well save your life. There are many ways that future health professionals can take care of their mental health. They can know what their limits are so they don't become trapped in a field that they can't succeed in. They can also take breaks when they need to so they can recharge and give high-quality care when it is most important. But most importantly, they must know when to seek help when their days seem darkest. For each individual, these three points can be the difference between life and death for their themselves and their patients, but we must not stop at one person. In many places, there can be a toxic culture in healthcare where one specialist insults another or where a charge nurse belittles the thoughts of the nursing assistant. If we are to truly make a difference, we have to replace this culture with one of support. Forgotten will be the days where med students are

terrified to ask the resident for help. Never again will the intern be afraid to correct the mistakes of others. This change needs to happen, and it can start with you.