

Successful Strategies to Mitigate Burnout at Your Practice



burn·out

/'bɜrn ,out/ | noun

The reduction of a fuel or substance to nothing through use or combustion.

Burnout is a term commonly used across all industries.

In the literal sense burnout happens when a flame has burned through its entire supply of 'fuel' (lighter fluid, fluid, wic, etc.) and is inflammable.

Mirroring that metaphor in the working-world, it is when an overworked employee runs out of steam and cannot perform the way they initially did.

The difference between the literal sense and the real-world sense is that our society easily understands the flame and doesn't always understand that human fuel is limited, as well.

We are taught from a young age to work hard and do what it takes to get the job done. We glorify those who work late and then come in early the next day. In the medical field especially, it is admirable when doctors and nurses work overtime. But this lifestyle isn't realistic nor is it healthy.

Your fuel (sleep, eating, rest) is limited and you can only work so hard for so long before you experience physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.

As a partner with many medical practices, we've seen this first hand.

Best,
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How We'll Tackle This

Because burnout affects both the health and performance of employees at all levels of organizations, having a prevention strategy is considered the most effective approach for addressing workplace burnout.

It's important to know the signs and symptoms of burnout, as well as what you can do to prevent or respond (when it inevitably happens at your office).

Regardless of position in a medical practice, each employee can have a significant influence over the factors that impact burnout.

Strategies that both administrative management and physicians can implement to help prevent burnout include:

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#1

Understand the Signs and Symptoms

If you're not watching closely, the signs of burnout can be easily overlooked.

Sometimes, even when you are looking, it's easy to misinterpret common signs (such as physician's performance, increased errors, or lower productivity) for an employee's "poor attitude" or "loss of motivation".

Back to our flame example—we wouldn't blame the wic for running out of fuel, but we're quick to judge humans who are underperforming at their job.

It's dangerous to overlook these negative effects of burnout, because they can escalate significantly before anyone addresses the problem. And someone with unaddressed burnout has an increased chance of developing clinical depression and other serious conditions.

Of course, there are symptoms that are little more expected—such as changes in attitudes and energy. But other signs might not be quite as intuitive. For example, an employee experiencing burnout is likely to work late to get their work done (and prevent further anxiety). They may not even realize that they are dealing with burnout as they focus on trying to keep up. These people often say things like "I just need to finish this project, then I'll be less stressed."

<i>How do you know if someone is burning out or just stressed?</i>	
Stress: experienced as feeling anxious and having a sense of urgency.	Burnout: experienced as helplessness, hopelessness, or apathy.
Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain and tension resulting from adverse of very demanding circumstances.	Burnout is the result of excessive stress classified as a cycle of negative emotions, paralysis and withdrawal. It is the exhaustion (mental, emotional, often physical) that leads to total disengagement and burnout.
When you're feeling stressed, it's likely that you can still see the bright side or the "light at the end of the tunnel".	Experiencing burnout means you are likely to keep revolving through a negative cycle of emotions.

Symptoms of Physician Burnout

If your physicians can't take care of themselves, how can you expect them to take care of their patients? The symptoms of physician burnout include physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Physical and Emotional Exhaustion

One of the biggest signs of physician burnout is the evident emotional and physical exhaustion that physicians feel. While stress can drain a physician, burnout can drain them to the point where they aren't able to bounce back. These physicians are likely to be found at the coffee maker throughout the day with bags under their eyes.

Reduced Sense of Personal Accomplishment

Physicians chose their career to help others. Their job is important and should feel as rewarding as it truly is. However, physicians who experience burnout often have a tendency to see their work negatively or without meaning—completely negating their purpose and motivation.

Depersonalization

Depersonalization begins when people begin to develop a negative and cynical attitude towards their work (patient's needs and concerns). This is the stage where they start to feel detached from their patients and their career as a whole.

An office experiencing progressing burnout may exhibit

<i>Initial:</i>	<i>Progressive:</i>	<i>Severe:</i>
Reduced efficiency and energy	Self-medication with alcohol and other substances	Poor physical health
Lowered levels of motivation	Sarcasm and negativity	Clinical depression
Increased errors	Debilitating self-doubt	Reduced job satisfaction
Fatigue	Poor workplace morale	Decreased productivity
Headaches	Communication breakdown	Increased absenteeism
Irritability		Increased risk of accidents
Increased frustration		Increased turnover of office
Suspiciousness		
More time spent working with less being accomplished		

#2

Set Expectations and Implement Training Support

A major cause of employee burnout is the feeling of a lack of control. The medical field is anything but predictable. But there are small changes your practice can do to help all your employees feel comfortable and supported. It can be intimidating to know where to start. Follow this:

For everything you do—be clear. You have to set reasonable and realistic expectations.

Provide clear expectations for all employees and confirm that each employee understands those expectations. Then, ensure that each employee has every resource necessary to meet the expectations.

For example: Job descriptions.

Say you're hiring a specialized nurse. You know that this nurse will be doing administrative tasks 60% of the time and clinical work 40% of the time.

(Now, remember, applicants went to school for the clinical side. Meaning their true passion is likely in the treatment of patients.)

You have to set/reset expectations. Otherwise, you are setting that employee up for dissatisfaction and ultimately burnout.

If they agree to the job description (through signature) and are equipped to do their job (having the right technology for efficiency and clinical training) they are more likely to do a good job, and less likely to be dissatisfied or experience burnout.

Ask yourself: do the job descriptions you have on file say one thing yet employees are taking on entirely different or additional duties?

You might need to go in and adjust job descriptions, titles, and your process for ongoing employee training to maintain competency.

This strategy can be used across the board. Organize and prioritize work needed into manageable and clear expectations by being intentional about priorities.

Be sensitive to employees who have a hard time prioritizing their workload. It's important to assess workload for those who feel pressured to remain working beyond normal business hours, consistently.

If your staff either super busy working, putting in overtime or the opposite where days are tediously slow—you might need to reallocate shifts to limit the extremities of schedules or hire more employees.

#3

**Make an Effort to
Support Self Care,
Mental Health,
And Relationship-
building**

When was the last time you assessed your workplace culture? Are you a supportive practice? Are there good relationships formed between the staff? Do your employees each feel valued? We'll address these one by one:

Are you a supportive practice?

Encourage social support and respect within physicians and administrative employees by providing opportunities for employees to help or support others.

Taking the attention away from what employees are not doing well, and instead encouraging them to mentor or coach someone else, intermingling help

Are there good relationships formed between staff?

If employees don't feel like they have a friend at work, they may start to feel isolated (and even alienated) from others. This creates a shadow over work—that could easily be mitigated in the right atmosphere.

By focusing on improving poor work relationships, your practice will be able to improve overall workplace morale and mitigate

Do your employees each feel valued?

Burnout is more likely when:

1. Employees expect too much of themselves and never feel that the work they are doing is good enough. This happens often in instances when employees have unreasonable demands placed upon them.
2. Employees feel they are constantly criticized and not appreciated for their extra value they bring.

Perhaps they are not in the correct role? Administrative persons who are having a hard time keeping up with phones or physicians are rushing through patient appointments, might be better suited in a different position.

Because employees experiencing burnout tend to have a significant loss of confidence, the major thing you can focus on is showing appreciation.

Helping employees understand their value to the practice and their contributions to the organization's goals will motivate them to continue for the "cause" and be team players. Work on intentionally recognizing successes and victories.

#4

If you find
yourself dealing
with burnout...

Individually, it's important to understand what burnout looks like for you (whether its putting yourself frustration, exhaustion, etc.). Identifying it early and verbalizing feelings can prevent a downward spiral and can mitigate future episodes of burnout.

We all have days when we feel fatigued and lack energy, concentration or motivation. It is important to check in on yourself and assess how you are feeling.

About once a week, use a scale from 1 - 10 (1 = no energy and 10 = high energy). If you notice you are feeling constantly down and exhausted, this is a signal that you need to refuel. Try to take a few days off or make a serious effort to increase participation in restorative activities.

Develop a list of self-care strategies, which could include:

Get Organized

When you have a lot on your mind, it helps to get it all on paper. Make a list of your priorities for the day, week, month and year. Then, focus on one thing at a time.

Multitasking has been proven to actually hurt efficiency and quality of your work. Instead, try to work at a reasonable, steady pace—checking off tasks as you complete them.

When you're close (or at) burnout, it's very important to resist working unnecessary overtime and scheduling assigned breaks from your work, to keep a nice balance. You don't want to push yourself to exhaustion.

If you're in a physician role, you more than likely don't have control over your schedule, but let you administrative team know that you will need time between patients to work in your EHR system to not get behind.

If you are feeling overwhelmed ask for help, delegate tasks or reset priorities with the team.

Change Your Work Environment

Burnout often follows monotony, so taking small breaks outside (or away from the office), going on walks during lunch, or setting new goals in the workplace can make a big difference in each day. It's important to have mental breaks during your workday, and a major break after the workday. Really take advantage of your free time. Develop hobbies, make and connect with friends, go to the gym, and incorporate relaxing activities into your life to allow your brain a break from work.

If the burnout is progressing, to the point you feel like your flame is burning out, it might be time for a real break—vacation.

Time away from work can help to provide a new and fresh perspective, allow you to recharge, and of course, expand your horizons beyond the confines of your work environment.

Shift Your Perspective

Perspective and attitude play a large part in your reality. Rather than feeling that you're a hostage to the practice, remember that you make an important impact in patients' lives everyday. Focus on these victories.

It's not easy to change your mentality. It's hard to even admit that you need a change. It's easy to deny that the current situation is damaging well-being and that changes are necessary.

Instead of accepting, we often try to rationalize with excuses like "you don't understand, no one else can do this" or "people are depending on me". Perhaps we "really want to be helpful" or are promising ourselves that we "will be fine once this is done".

“ But the truth is, work-life balance doesn't get better until your perspective does. ”

Until you prioritize yourself over work, and are okay with saying no—you will continue to push yourself over the limit.

So, challenge yourself to set boundaries in terms of what you will and will not do and learn to be comfortable with saying no. If you don't have your health, then you certainly won't have your job. So, know what your needs are and prioritize them.

Focus on Health

How you restore yourself is up to your personal preference. Try to follow the basics. Get enough sleep. Follow a healthy eating plan (consider cutting alcohol, caffeine, or sugar).

A large part of mental health is physical health. Exercise is proven to decrease stress and improve emotional well-being. You can also consider exercise, massage therapy, or even acupuncture to aid stress management.

Find Support, Spend Time with Friends and Family

After a day of talking with patients and coordinating appointments, it's easy to withdraw from your social support. However, emotional connections are critical aspects of self-care. Connect with people who care about you on a regular basis.

Schedule this time with others so that connecting is not left up to chance, and make it a priority. Do not get in the habit of choosing to stay late for work and cancel plans with your support.

Equally important, you should minimize or eliminate exposure to negative and toxic people in your life. At work, if there is a negative employee that continues to vent, it can be really hard to stay positive. By cutting negative people out, you'll find it easier to shift your perspective.

Toxic crowds are also easy to come by with social media, so if needed, take a break from your social accounts.

Identify Uncontrollable Factors and Get Help When Needed

The list of frustrations in the current healthcare system is quite long. Try to systemically and thoughtfully determine the things on your list that you can control and the things that are completely out of your control. If at all possible, don't invest your time and energy in the things you can't control, as doing so leads to feelings of helplessness and psychological impotence.

Doctors especially, don't like to admit when they are having difficulty. However, ignoring warning signs of burnout leads to much worse outcomes including decreased productivity, impaired relationships, and clinical depression.

Rather than fearing and avoiding your supervisor, see him or her as an important person in helping to bring about positive change. Most supervisors know that a happy employee is a productive one. So, there's a good chance he or she may not even know that you're unhappy.

Approach your supervisor with that mindset and enlist his or her help in making work more desirable. They might be able to work with you on your schedule, work assignments, workload or any other resources you need to get the job done.

#5

Outsource to Relieve Bandwidth

There are so many tasks that your team has to complete in your day-to-day routines. Because each duty requires your undivided attention and articulation, it's important that your office doesn't spread itself too thin.

Some of the most time consuming responsibilities include updating patient charts and documenting health records.

Hiring a partner for administrative tasks can save you time, allowing you more time to care for patients and to care for yourself.

Medical transcription, for example, can relieve your team of inputting notes into the EHR or correcting errors from voice recognition technologies. Below are three benefits of transcription.

Practice Cost-efficiency

With less money spent on administrative tasks and more spent on patient care and moral, you'll be able to bring on more physicians and employees will likely find their job more rewarding!

Focus on What Matters

The true purpose of a physician's job is to care for their patients. With more time to do just that, physicians are not only able to help more patients, but they're also able to provide better quality care.

Patient Experience

Marking down every detail of a patient's appointment or medical history not only takes away from the doctor-patient relationship, but it can also be a distraction during the patient's appointment.

With a team of transcriptionists working on entering data into the EHR (Electronic Health Record) system, you can rest assured that the information will be accurate and concise. This leaves more time to care for your patients and more time to care for yourself.

Partnering with the right medical transcription company can be just the thing to help lighten the load. [Visit our website](https://www.datamatrixmedical.com/) to learn more about how medical transcription services can help your team.



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