Introduction

Physicians seldom receive training on time management and/or self-care at any point in their career. As a result, many physicians have difficulty creating balance in their lives or incorporating self-care into their schedules. Persons who do not care for themselves are less effective at providing optimal care for others. Approximately 50% of physicians report burnout and the suicide rate among physicians is significantly higher than observed for the general population. In addition, burnout exposes physicians to the risk of medical errors and litigation. In recent decades, the role of physician fatigue in causing medical errors has led to the implementation of duty hours for physicians in training. There is now growing attention to the need for strategies to prevent and treat fatigue/burnout among practicing physicians.

Persons who recognize when they are becoming overextended and implement corrective strategies are less likely to end up completely burnt out than persons who do not make an effort to address their fatigue. The following series of four articles outlines recommendations for managing potential risks, fostering resilience, avoiding fatigue and addressing burnout.

Series Part One: Preventing Burnout by Managing Potential Risks

Burnout is physical and/or emotional exhaustion due to an extended period of stress and/or frustration. Multiple factors put physicians at risk for burnout including their specialty/sub-specialty. For example, the risk of burnout is significantly
higher for emergency medicine physicians compared to physicians who specialize in preventive medicine. Physicians
who practice in specialties that are more prone to burnout may benefit from taking additional precautions to avoid
burnout. Factors implicated in physician burnout are listed below.

Professional causes of physician burnout:

- Lack of autonomy/control over your work
- Long work hours
- Too many responsibilities
- High patient volume
- Complex patients
- Information overload
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations
- Short deadlines
- Unpleasant work environment
- Monotonous tasks
- High stress tasks
- Frequent exposure to adverse events
- Feeling unappreciated
- Threat of malpractice suits

Personal causes of physician burnout:

- Inadequate time for recreation, relaxation and/or sleep
- Inadequate time spent socializing
- Poor stress management skills
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of supportive relationships/feeling isolated
- Type A personality/perfectionistic tendencies
- Pessimistic view of yourself and the world
- Financial stress

Eliminating stress completely is not feasible; however, burnout can be avoided by removing stressors where possible
and adapting your response to stressors that cannot be controlled. Below are recommendations that may improve the
ability to avoid burnout by modifying stressful circumstances.

- Work in teams to decrease workload
- Incorporate periods of down-time when working long shifts
- Don’t use down-time to complete charts or perform other work related activities
- Develop time-management skills (more details in part 2 of this series, “Fostering Resilience”)
- Know the policies and procedures at your facility/institution for handling burnout and utilize available resources
- Avoid excessive workloads by saying no when appropriate
- Pack meals/snacks if you don’t have easy access to healthy meals while at work
- Get adequate sleep - between 7 to 8 hours of sleep is recommended per night to avoid fatigue
- Foster personal relationships and avoid spending prolonged periods in isolation
- Seek advice on managing finances. Many physicians start their career with large student loans. Obtaining
  advice from a financial counselor can alleviate financial stress

Go to part two. [1]

Go to part three. [2]
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References and Resources:


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