



THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS HEALTH SYSTEM

# Gratification and Fulfillment: Mitigating Burn-out in Medicine

TURNING POINT

A Community Resource of



THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS HEALTH SYSTEM

# Medscape National Physician Burnout and Depression Report 2018

- More than 15,000 physicians from 29 specialties responded
- 42% reported burnout
- 12% reported colloquial depression
- 3% reported clinical depression

# Highest Burnout Rates

- 48% intensivists and neurologists
- 47% family physicians
- 46% ob/gyn and internists
- 45% emergency medicine and radiologists

# Lowest Burnout Rates

- 23% plastic surgeons
- 32% dermatologists and pathologists
- 33% ophthalmologists
- Males experience less burnout than females  
38% vs 48%
- Work pressure affects employed and self-employed equally

# Major Contributors to Burnout

- 56% say bureaucratic tasks
- 39% say too many work hours
- 70% report colloquial depression
- 19% report clinical depression

# How do Physicians Cope with Burnout?

- 50% exercise
- 46% talk with family and friends
- 42% sleep
- 36% isolate themselves from others
- 36% listen to music
- Less than 33% eat junk food, binge eat, drink alcohol, smoke or use prescription drugs

# How do Physicians Avert Burnout?

- Exercise
- Have autonomy, flexibility, or both
- Maintain a sense of accomplishment – even joy
- Manage expectations and have a positive outlook
- Like their patients
- Have supportive colleagues, family or both
- Work in a good environment
- Work part-time or locum tenens
- Able to balance home and work life

# Defining Anxiety

- The kind of anxiety we are referring to is not the same as what therapists or psychologists use to diagnose individuals nor is it the existential angst referred to by philosophers.
- Anxiety is the byproduct of being mortal – part of the human condition. Edwin Friedman likened chronic anxiety to “the volatile atmosphere of a gas-fume-filled room where any sparking could set off a conflagration, and where people would then blame the person who struck the match rather than having tried to disperse the fumes.”

## Looking at Anxiety from a System Perspective

- Lots of change and uncertainty
- Medicine is responding to the anxiety at the political level, drug company level, health insurer level
- Hospitals and medical centers are reacting to the environment that is effecting it
- Physicians and hospital staff are reacting to the system
- Patients are reacting to the system

# Chronic Anxiety in America

- Leads to regression and reactivity
- Despite a plethora of self-help literature, human rights movements, etc. we struggle to quell the anxious reactions of groups at every level
- Look at stats for increased depression, suicide, violence, school shootings, etc.
- Some researchers argue that we have lowered our “pain” thresholds – valuing comfort over the rewards of facing challenges. A quick-fix mentality.

# Anxiety in a System

- The health of a system is determined by how the system handles the always present and natural tension of individuals and groups
- A healthy system maintains integrity during crisis
- A healthy system has the capacity to produce strong self-defined leaders

## What is Necessary for a System or Group to Function During Times of Stress and Instability

- A sense of control
- Predictable accessible outlets for frustration
- A broad predictable relationship network around you
- The instability of a group is one of perception
- Unstable units show changes in physiology, mental processes and behavior

## The Noisier the Environment, The More You Need to Manage Your Own Anxiety

- Distinguish the facts from the noise – facts and perception of facts
- Be aware of your own anxiety and don't take on the anxiety of others
- Reduce anxiety in the system by gathering and focusing on facts rather than feelings
- React from thinking rather than feeling – know the difference
- Avoid over functioning for others – be a resource not the savior
- Keep self-defining

## What to Look for When Anxiety Intensifies

- Heightened sensitivity to others in the group
- Shifts in perception and interpretation of events and behavior
- Increasing defensive behavior
- More aggression, conflict, dominant behavior
- Alliances appear and dissolve – mob processes emerge and in extreme cases, violence

## Things to Remember About Anxiety in a System

- Reactivity – Thinking vs feeling. Stay calm, step out, stay in
- Herding – where the forces of togetherness triumph over individual maturity and thinking. Mediate by adapting toward strength and calm
- Blame displacement – focus is on factors that victimize you. Mediate by focusing on hardy attitudes
- A quick-fix mentality – a low pain threshold that seeks symptom relief rather than fundamental change. Mediate by allowing time for processes to mature. This takes patience.
- Lack of well-differentiated leadership – a failure of nerve that both stems from and contributes to 1-4 above.

# Effective Leaders

- Have good control of their own emotional reactivity
- Have the ability to establish relationships and remain in contact with various factions that push for rapid, fix-it change and narrow self-interest
- Have the ability to remain in contact with intense, conflictual others
- Have the ability to discriminate among threats and challenges
- Recognize situations that must be responded to and those that are not a significant challenge
- Can assess the effectiveness of their response
- Have outlets for frustration
- Do not over-function for others

# Self-Defining in a System

- Be aware of organizational anxiety and don't absorb it
- Reduce anxiety in system by gathering and focusing on facts rather than feelings
- Recognize your own anxiety, know how to quiet it, and choose thoughtful responses
- Avoid over-functioning for others
- Understand and observe triangles and avoid taking sides. State your position based on facts
- Sharpen your ability to observe behavior rather than reacting Focus on self and not what's wrong with others
- Respect the people you are dependent upon
- Become a working model for others, and by example, the functioning of others will improve

“The psychological filters with which those external events are perceived alter the resultant physiology with at least as much potency as the stressor itself...For us clever primates, life is filled with ambiguous events, and we differ as to whether we quench life’s thirsts from glasses that are perceived as half full or half empty”

Robert Sapolsky