How to Maintain Joy in Daily Practice

A Panel Discussion

A. Schwarz and O. Herfort
Burnout

- Emotional exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy
- Not recognized by DSM-5
- Prevalence 2011: 45%, and 2014: 54.4%
practice staff."

If physicians want to keep burnout at bay, Dr. Linzer said there are some serious signs they should never ignore. Here are seven ways to know if your practice is getting the best of you—and when to finally do something about it:

1. **You have a high tolerance to stress.**
   Stress consistently ranks as the number one predictor for burnout among physicians, Dr. Linzer said. "Please don't ignore the stress, even if you can take it," he said. Physicians who consistently operate under high stress are at least 15 times more likely to burn out, according to his research.

2. **Your practice is exceptionally chaotic.**
   A quick glance around your practice will let you know if you or your colleagues may cave to stress. "People tend to think it's the patients that always stress doctors out, but actually, it's the opposite," Dr. Linzer said. "Caring for patients keeps doctors motivated. What burns them out is caring for patients in a high-stress environment. Change the environment and you'll change the overall quality of care."

3. **You don't agree with your boss' values or leadership.**
   This one is particularly tricky to identify but "necessary to prevent burnout," Dr. Linzer said. Whether at a large hospital or private practice, physicians need to feel as if the people leading them also share their values for medicine and patient care. Otherwise, their motivation can slowly wane.

4. **You're the emotional buffer.**
   Working with patients requires more than medical expertise. "Often, the doctor acts as an emotional buffer," Dr. Linzer said. "We will buffer the patient from our own stressful environment until we can't take it anymore."

5. **Your job constantly interferes with family events.**
   Spending quality time with loved ones helps physicians perform better. "When they can't do those things, it's all they think about during the day and the patient suffers," Dr. Linzer said, citing work-life interference as one of the most common predictors for burnout among physicians in his studies.

6. **You lack control over your work schedule and free time.**
   When work demands increase, but control over your schedule doesn't, stress can kick in and spark burnout. That's why Dr. Linzer often tells practices, "If you standardize, customize" — a medical mantra to suggest that if physicians must work a long standardized set of hours each week, practices should at least customize their schedules to flexibly fit changes or needs in their daily lives.

7. **You don't take care of yourself.**
   When was the last time you enjoyed a nice bubble bath or morning run? If you continually neglect yourself, you may neglect your patients, too. "As physicians, we want to be altruistic but one of the keys to altruism is self-care," Dr. Linzer said.

Did you fit most of these signs? If you think you or your fellow physicians are suffering from excessive stress, check out these tips from residents who have conquered burnout. Find more on maintaining a happy medical family in Physician Family, the AMA Alliance's magazine.

Also review these burnout busters and physician-friendly tips to increase satisfaction in your practice.

Preventing physician burnout is a priority for the AMA's Professional Satisfaction and Practice Sustainability initiative, which partners with physicians, leaders, and policymakers to reduce the complexity and costs of practicing medicine so physicians can continue to put patients first.

By AMA staff writer Lyndra Veeser
Physician Burnout – the Three Symptoms, Three Phases and Three Cures

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