

Stress and Burnout in an Environment of Change

Texas Medical Association
Committee on Physician Health and Wellness



Physicians Caring for Texans



Stress and Burnout in an Environment of

Provided by the Committee on Physician Health and Wellness

The **stress** of adjusting to change can lead to **burnout**.

DEFINITION OF STRESS

Stress is an internal process that occurs when a person is faced with a demand he or she perceives to exceed the resources available to respond to it effectively, and where failure to deal effectively with the demand has important and undesirable consequences.

Everyone must cope with stress in one way or another or suffer its effects. Both major life changes (e.g., deaths, births, divorce, marriage, career changes) and minor ones (e.g., mortgage, change in activities, illness, holiday gatherings) are contributing factors when assessing the likelihood of stress leading to illness.

MEDICAL PROFESSION STRESSORS FROM THE BEGINNING

- Interviews
- Exams, rotations, and clinical caseloads
- Pressures of time and years of preparation
- Finding and matching a good residency
- Choosing a specialty

- Financial debt
- Inherent uncertainty in patient care
- Chronic fatigue
- Dealing with death or difficult issues
- Difficult and demanding patients
- Maintaining clinical competence
- Fear of lawsuits/malpractice claims
- Decreased autonomy/insurance issues/third-party intrusions
- Problems with hospital administrators, hospital and office staff
- Relationships, parenting and family issues (including balancing career and family)
- Paperwork
- Governmental regulations/Medicare/Medicaid

DEFINITION OF BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.

RISK FACTORS FOR BURNOUT

- Perfectionism and need to control
- Belief that to reveal emotions = weakness

- “Patients should always come first”
- Type A personality (overachiever)
- Reluctance to ask for help or inability to recognize personal needs
- Self-sacrifice

SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

Behavioral:

- Tardiness, absenteeism, medication errors
- Deteriorating quality of charting
- Inefficient patient care
- Procrastination and missing deadlines
- Emotional outbursts and tearfulness
- Avoiding interactions with people
- Substance use disorders
- Preoccupation with thoughts of relocation or retirement

Physical:

- Fatigue, weakness, dizziness
- Rapid pulse and heart palpitations
- Gastrointestinal complaints
- Weight changes
- Sleep difficulties
- Reduced resistance to infection
- Frequent or lingering illnesses
- Hypertension
- Head, back, and muscle aches

Emotional/Psychological:

- Apathy, boredom, hopelessness
- Depression, anxiety, poor concentration



- Irritability and critical attitude
- Feelings of alienation and isolation
- Depersonalization of patients
- Sense of low personal accomplishment
- Faulty thinking processes

Spiritual:

- Doubt in beliefs/value system
- Anger/bitterness at God,
- Withdrawal from Higher Power
- Lack/loss of spirituality

Take the following Girdino self-assessment exercise to gauge your own personal stress level as a result of overload. (*Girdino et al. Controlling Stress and Tension, 1996*)

Self-Assessment Exercise

Overload, or overstimulation, refers to the state in which the demands around you exceed your capacity to meet them.

The four major factors in overload are (1) time pressures, (2) excessive responsibility or accountability, (3) lack of support, and (4) excessive expectations from you and those around you. Any one or a combination of these factors can result in stress from overload.

Choose the most appropriate answer.

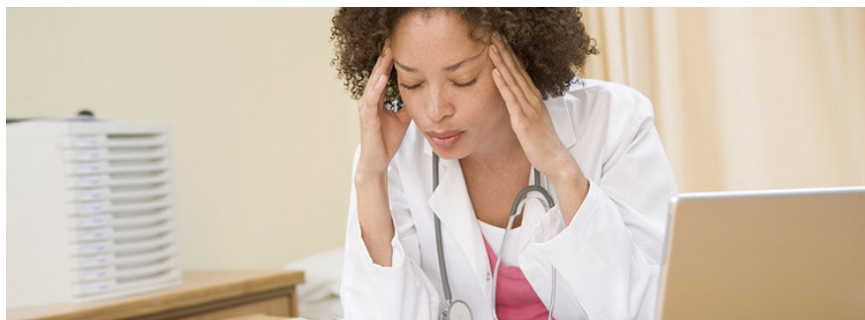
How often do you ...

- (a) almost always=4 pts (b) often=3 pts
(c) seldom=2 pts (d) almost never=1 pt

- ___ 1. Find yourself with insufficient time to do things you really enjoy?
- ___ 2. Wish you had more support/assistance?
- ___ 3. Lack sufficient time to complete your work most effectively?
- ___ 4. Have difficulty falling asleep because you have too much on your mind?
- ___ 5. Feel people simply expect too much from you?
- ___ 6. Feel overwhelmed?
- ___ 7. Find yourself becoming forgetful or indecisive because you have too much on your mind?
- ___ 8. Consider yourself to be in a high-pressure situation?
- ___ 9. Feel you have too much responsibility for one person?
- ___ 10. Feel exhausted at the end of the day?

Calculate your total score. **Total = _____**

A score of 25-40 indicates a high stress level, one that could be psychologically and physiologically debilitating.



WHAT CAN YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

Suggestions for managing stress:

- Take advantage of student/health/counseling or community resources
- Be aware of your risk for burnout
- Learn and practice stress management techniques
- Use nutritional common sense
- Get regular exercise
- Use good sleep hygiene
- Avoid use or misuse of alcohol
- Avoid use of illicit substances
- Develop medical and social support systems
- Practice time-management skills
- Plan vacations, variety in daily tasks
- Take continuing education courses to sharpen your skills
- Consider psychotherapy
- Learn relaxation/biofeedback techniques
- Develop your sense of humor
- Reassess your spiritual relationship
- Improve communication skills
- Develop new interests and hobbies

Resilience involves maintaining flexibility and balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events.

Suggestions for maintaining resilience:

- Maintain and nurture relationships
- Make time for self through
 - » Exercise
 - » Hobbies
 - » Vacation
- Focus on the special people in your life
- Address spiritual needs
- Seek help
- Establish priorities
- Set realistic financial goals
- Adopt time-management techniques
- Plan for retirement
- Embrace change
- Keep a sense of humor
- Join peer support systems
- Practice mindfulness

Texas Medical Association Committee on Physician Health and Wellness

*Providing Health and Wellness Education for
Physicians, Residents, and Medical Students.*



Other Resources From TMA

- TMA Educational Loans and Scholarships (www.tmaloanfunds.com/), info@tmaloanfunds.com
- TMA health and wellness continuing medical education provided by the Committee on Physician Health and Wellness (www.texmed.org/Education)
- TMA PBF Wellness Fund (www.texmed.org/Hope/)
- TMA Student Loan Refinancing Resource Center (www.texmed.org/Refi/), (800) 880-7955

Additional Resources

- Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, Tools and Resources for Resident and Faculty Member Well-Being (www.acgme.org/What-We-Do/Initiatives/Physician-Well-Being/Resources)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org/), (888) 333-2377
- American Medical Association STEPSforward™ (www.stepsforward.org/)
- National Academy of Medicine Clinician Well-Being Knowledge Hub (www.nam.edu/resource-toolkit-clinician-well-being-knowledge-hub/)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/), (800) 273-8255
- SAMHSA National Help Line (for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders), (800) 662-HELP (4357)
- Texas Physician Health Program (www.txphp.state.tx.us/), (512) 305-7462 or info@txphp.state.tx.us

The Committee on Physician Health and Wellness sees stress and burnout as part of a continuum that may lead to physician impairment:

Stress → Distress → Burnout → Impairment

As a committee, we deal with both ends of this continuum by promoting physician health, and also by dealing with physician impairment. We hope to help you find solutions to the increasing challenges of adjusting to changes in our field and staying healthy.

**Save a life. Save a career.
Get help for yourself or a friend.**

www.texmed.org/PHW

Texas Medical Association Committee on Physician Health and Wellness
(800) 880-1300 or (512) 370-1300

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