

Burnout in Health Care

Organizational Impacts & Solutions

The Illinois
ACEs Response
Collaborative

Health & Medicine
POLICY RESEARCH GROUP

Burnout, a syndrome that stems from severe workplace stress, is a topic of increased concern for hospitals and health care organizations.ⁱ It significantly affects the physical and mental well-being of the workforce, contributes to high rates of staff turnover, and impacts the quality of care that patients receive.ⁱⁱ Burnout has been a persistent challenge for health care further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hospital and health system leaders must identify the factors that drive burnout within their institutions, implement policies and practices to mitigate burnout, and collectively advocate for public policy solutions to address the underlying, systemic drivers of burnout.

DRIVERS OF BURNOUT



Productivity demands Under current insurance payment models, health care workers are forced to see as many patients as they can, in as little time as possible, which leads to higher rates of job dissatisfaction and burnout for care teams.^{viii}



Paperwork Care team productivity is affected by the excessive time and effort spent documenting the care, particularly through the electronic health records (EHR) system.^{ix} Many health care workers report completing EHR documentation once their shifts have ended so they can spend more time with patients.^x



Culture of stress Many health care workers report that the high stakes, high stress nature of their workplaces is treated as an acceptable—and even positive—element of their organization's culture. Staff who report burnout or stress regularly find their symptoms minimized or used against them by both peers and leadership.

IMPACT OF BURNOUT

Staff outcomes Burnout has a significant impact on the health and well-being of staff and can lead to conditions such as chronic fatigue, migraines, cardiovascular conditions, and Type 2 Diabetes.^{xii} It has also been linked to high rates among staff of depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and divorce.^{xiii} Most distressingly, burnout is associated with a 200% increase in suicidal ideation amongst health care workers.^{xiv}



Patient outcomes Burnout also creates a dangerous environment for patients: short-staffed and exhausted medical teams spend less time with patients, deal with chronic supply and bed shortages, and are more likely to make errors. Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout was linked to higher rates of health care related infections and medical malpractice lawsuits.^{vii} Enhancing patient satisfaction and health outcomes requires a commitment to supporting staff and improving workplace satisfaction.



Organizational outcomes Burnout affects the health of the institution and its patients and staff. Worker retention and turnover are examples of burnout's significant costs to an organization. In June 2021, 29% of health care workers said they planned to quit the industry and enter a new field.^{xv} One study found that the price tag was an estimated \$500,000^{xvii} for every physician and \$40,038 for every nurse who leaves.^{xviii}



In a June 2019 study, the cost of physician burnout to the health care industry was an estimated \$4.6 billion per year.^{xvii} Provider errors cost hospitals an estimated \$20 billion annually in increased patient lengths of stay, enhanced types of care, and malpractice suits.^{xix}

A CALL TO ACTION

Health care organizations can build the resilience and well-being of their workforce by examining and reforming the institutional policies and practices that drive burnout.

Staff must inform the creation of workplaces that are healing-centered and prevent burnout, but it cannot be their burden alone: **workplace wellness can only be achieved by addressing burnout on multiple levels.**

Acknowledge the problem Track and acknowledge the problem of burnout throughout an organization and emphasize the importance of provider well-being. Demonstrate a commitment to reducing burnout by identifying provider well-being as a core organizational value.^{ix}

Measure/assess the problem Include metrics for provider satisfaction and well-being to assess staff needs and determine untapped resources and knowledge amongst staff. These metrics can include pace of work, sense of control, and values alignment with leadership, as well as satisfaction, stress, and burnout.ⁱ

Tailor interventions Use metrics to identify high-risk departments and engage staff to develop interventions tailored to their needs.^{ix}

Implement trauma-informed care Begin the organizational change process of becoming trauma-informed, which is intended to promote healing and reduce the risk of re-traumatization for both patients and staff.

Build community Reduce isolation and build support by creating physical space for providers to congregate and encouraging them to spend time together.^{ix}

Address EHR stress Lengthen appointment times to account for the burden of completing EHRs, or block off time each day so that providers are able to complete documentation before their shifts end.^{xx}

Create compensation models Incorporate dimensions of self-care into productivity-based pay, or transition to salaried compensation models.^{ix}

Provide workplace flexibility Provide more flexible work schedules by allowing providers to work reduced hours or shift their hours to better meet their personal needs.^{ix}

Advocate for policy change Hospitals and health care organizations must advocate for broader public policy changes that address the primary drivers of burnout, including payment models, technology systems, and licensing requirements.

Additional Support from the Illinois ACEs Response Collaborative

This resource was developed by the Illinois ACEs Response Collaborative (The Collaborative), a program of Health & Medicine Policy Research Group. The Collaborative offers trainings and tailored capacity building on trauma-informed approaches for organizations interested in building resilience and promoting thriving among staff and communities.

Contact training@hmprg.org or [visit our website](#) for more information.

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