



MidAtlantic AIDS Education and Training Center Workplace Burnout Guide for Health Professionals



Workplace burnout is defined as a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity.

In healthcare settings, chronic stress, or stress related to caring for patients with critical medical illnesses, acute and chronic psychological illness, trauma, those in the dying process, unresolved organizational and systems issues, to name a few, can lead to burnout. Unrecognized or acknowledged chronic stress puts health professionals at risk not only to burnout but to their own stress-related medical and psychological disorders, maladaptive coping strategies, relationship issues and conflicts, depression, anxiety, and general discontent.

Types of burnout: Maslach describes the three dimensions of burnout.

- 1. Exhaustion:** Feeling overextended, both emotionally and physically.
- 2. Cynicism:** Taking a cold, cynical attitude toward responsibilities.
- 3. Ineffectiveness:** Feeling ineffective leading to growing sense of inadequacy.

Signs and Symptoms

- Disengagement from work
- Chronic mental and physical fatigue
- Chronic feelings of being overwhelmed
- Frequent use of sick time, tardiness
- Frequent physical complaints
- Numerous last-minute time off requests
- Complaints about other employees, assignments, system
- Lack of empathy, compassion
- Irritability and cynicism
- Poor work performance

Workplace factors that increase burnout include:

- Increased work hours
- Added tasks, assignments
- Inadequate work/life balance
- Increased focus on productivity
- Lack of leadership
- Poor teamwork
- Conflict in workplace
- Limited flexibility or control
- Poor team morale

Early Signs of Caregiver Burnout

- **Self-deprecating thoughts of value on your team:**

Example: "my best is not good enough"

- **Sunday Blues, dread and anxiety at start of work week:**

Example: "I don't want to go to work"

Sustained Signs of Caregiver Burnout

- **Feeling a loss of control:**

Example: "I can't keep up with all this work"

- **Feeling overburdened:**

Example: "I have so much work I don't even know where to start"

- **Ready to leave before day begins:**

Example: "Hmm... How can I leave early?"

- **View of world:**

Example: "There is no hope for this place!"

Consequences of unaddressed burnout in workplace

1. Decreased patient satisfaction and poorer patient outcomes
2. Increased medication errors and other errors
3. Staff turnover and early retirements

Methods for Addressing Caregiver Burnout

While experiencing burnout can be serious, there are several tools and resources that can be used for those experiencing it and those who see someone else experiencing it.

Helpful Tools for Caregivers Experiencing Burnout

- **Reestablish a schedule and routine to regain sense of control.**

Example: Start a morning routine, keep set lunch time if possible.

- **Reorganize your goals and set specific subgoals to focus on.**

Example: Have a monthly goal and weekly goals to reach it.

- **Reenergize by obtaining professional help.**

Example: Take advance of workplace employee services.

- **Ask for help if your workload is demanding.**

Example: Communicate with supervisors.

- **Reflect on your day and make a to-do list for the next day.**

Example: Daily reflection and positive affirmations.

- **Focus on wellness.**

Example: Improve exercise, nutrition, and sleep habits.

How to Help A Fellow Caregiver Experiencing Burnout

- Encourage taking allotted breaks, pace the workflow if possible
- Check in with co-workers, offer help with workload
- Offer suggestions to others for health and wellness
- Offer listening in times of crisis or stress with referrals to resources
- Avoid attempting to be a co-worker counselor or therapist
- Affirm the value of all team members

Resources for Caregiver Burnout

- Utilize planners and life coaches: regain control.
- Self care emphasis: rest, nutrition, time for self.
- Use daily affirmation apps: enhance positive thinking.
- Employee assistance programs: share available resources.

Available interventions for burnout and related psychological disorders

- Mindfulness and deep breathing techniques

- Exercise

- Cognitive behavioral therapy

- Biofeedback

- Massage and physical therapy

- Short term psychotherapy

- Career counseling

- Psychotropic medications

Advocating for Mental Health Support in Healthcare Settings

As employees and employers, it is important to advocate for services and resources to support physical and mental health.

Here are some helpful guidelines to consider:

- Be professional in bringing to light concerns
- Know the facts about specific work concerns
- Clarify the problem and consider the underlying needs
- Follow the proper procedures to voice concerns
- Be resourceful and offer your skills
- Avoid threatening, blaming individuals
- Suggest interventions that may reduce stress
- Consider developing materials and training
- Suggest focus groups to discuss stress in the workplace
- Provide written information on medical and psychosocial support services in the organization and community

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