

What Are the Signs of Burnout?

- 1** Physician burnout may present as a **lack of motivation**—the career your doctors studied and worked hard for no longer satisfies them. Somehow, with the passage of time and mounting stress, they've lost their influence.
- 2** **Doctors may feel that their work no longer matters.** Believing they are just another cog in the machine, they may detach from their work. And their patients. Disengaged and unfocused, they may cut corners, misdiagnose a patient, or request inappropriate or unnecessary testing.
- 3** **Doctors may express anger about the nature of their work.** They may also bemoan their patients, especially when those patients don't follow their advice. This manifests as increased skepticism or even snide remarks. Doctors may become more pessimistic when they believe their patients are not heeding their counsel or following instructions (Hughes, 2021).
- 4** **A burned-out doctor may retreat from the emotional side of their job.** They will often refrain from participating in events. Seeking to avoid others, they don't consult with peers as often as they once did. Isolation at work is a sure symptom of growing stress and anxiety that leads to burnout.
- 5** **A doctor's personal relationships can also be affected.** Emotional bonds with a partner or spouse can become strained, causing domestic unhappiness, separation, or divorce.
- 6** **Physicians may complain of exhaustion that is not helped by temporary time off, rest, or vacation** (Robert Pearl, 2019). This mental and physical exhaustion is debilitating, causing doctors to wonder whether they can keep working at all.
- 7** **They may consider relocating to another practice, hospital, or location.** As with professionals in all vocations, burned-out physicians think their lives will improve if they just change roles, jobs, or locations. Will they have more time off? More compensation? The grass looks greener when your lawn is...burnt out.
- 8** **They may show an apparent decreased interest in hobbies and activities.** Fatigue in the workplace carries over to fatigue at home and in social environments. The once-beneficial relationships and recreation no longer help well-being, throwing off work-life balance.
- 9** **Physicians may admit that they are stifled by burnout.** According to Advisory Board:
 - 53 percent of doctors claim burnout harms their routines.
 - 35 percent experience extreme irritation with their patients.
 - 26 percent of doctors reveal that they are less willing to check on their patients.
 - 14 percent admit to making mistakes they otherwise don't make during typical routines.
 - 53 percent of physicians admit that burnout has an adverse impact on their lives (Advisory Board)

- 10** *They may dread going to work.* Doctors will arrive late or call in sick.
- 11** *They may have decreased efficiency and productivity.* As burnout advances, it affects a doctor's capacity to work. They see fewer patients, schedule and perform fewer procedures, or read fewer cases per hour or shift (Eschenroeder et al., 2021).
- 12** *They may express resentment when compared to their peers.* As they start to feel detached, doctors know their performance is sliding. Many physicians are competitive, and when compared to others, the pace of their downward spiral will often increase. Even small comparisons can spur anger, or isolation (Kane, 2021).
- 13** *Family and friends may comment that the doctor seems unhappy.* Family and friends are usually the first to notice negative changes. They're the ones hearing complaints about work, seeing a lack of interest in family gatherings and social events, and enduring last-minute cancellations.
- 14** *Physicians who face burnout become incredibly introverted.* They isolate themselves, spending more time alone at work and at home. Physicians, as a group, are often reluctant to seek help; they try to cope independently, but these coping methods are not always healthy, and the burnout can worsen. 41 percent of medical professionals isolate themselves when they face burnout (Medscape, 2021).
- 15** *Patients notice that their practitioners are more abrupt and may even be downright rude.* Patients will say the doctor seemed "frustrated" or "impatient." They may not bother to answer questions. If a patient repeats the question, the doctor might even lash out. Seeing these patient evaluations will likely make the doctor even more despondent. Physicians who face burnout feel trapped, helpless, and defeated.
- 16** *They may abdicate their responsibilities.* They'll wait for another physician to see the patient before stepping in. Fear of failure, or loss of confidence, may cause them to hesitate to advise treatment.
- 17** *Physical symptoms* can include:
1. Increased headaches
 2. Dizziness
 3. Muscle pains, tight muscles, or strained joints
 4. Loss of appetite or interest in food
 5. Increased appetite (stress eating)
 6. Lower immunity and more illness
 7. Increased use of alcohol or pain-relief medications



Doctors Excel at Hiding Their Burnout

If you're on the prowl to find instances of burnout, be warned: Most physicians are **adept** at masking their symptoms because of underlying (and often unspoken) professional pressures, expectations, and stigmas. Part of the problem is the culture of medicine; the result is a lot of avoidable suffering.