

Burnout impacts transplant nurses, study finds

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More than half of nurses who work with organ transplant patients in the United States experience high levels of emotional exhaustion, a primary sign of burnout, according to a study published by researchers at Henry Ford Hospital.

In addition, 52% of the nurses surveyed reported feeling low levels of personal accomplishment in their life-saving work, according to findings published recently in *Progress in Transplantation*, a journal of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses.

Senior staff psychologist Michelle Jesse, Ph.D., led the Henry Ford Transplant Institute study with liver transplant surgeon Marwan Abouljoud, M.D.; senior staff psychologist Anne Eshelman, Ph.D.; and registered nurse and Transplant Institute Administration Manager Kathleen Hogan.

"At the end of the day, the nurses spend the most time with the patients and wear all the hats in a health system," says Dr. Jesse. "Plus, transplant nurses work really hard trying to get their patients listed to get a transplant, they get to know the family and sometimes it doesn't work out. And that's really tough. They're just an incredible group."

Despite the difficulties, only 16% of transplant nurses said they try to emotionally distance themselves from their patients. A common reaction by those feeling overwhelmed in stressful situations, distancing in the nursing profession can be misconstrued as indifference to patients, Jesse

explains.

The findings come from online surveys distributed by the International Transplant Nursing Society in 2013. Of those sent out, data was received from 369 transplant [nurses](#) working across the United States.

A similar study about transplant surgeons published last year by the Henry Ford Hospital team found nearly half of organ transplant surgeons report a low sense of personal accomplishment and 40% feel emotionally exhausted.

"High-pressure specialties like transplantation can intensify feelings of [burnout](#) common in medicine," says Dr. Abouljoud, director of the Henry Ford Transplant Institute. "It's imperative that organizations develop systems to prevent it."

The findings send a strong message that [transplant](#) centers need to create an environment that nurtures not only [patients](#) but their caregivers as well, adds Jesse.

"It has to be more than on an individual level," she says. "It has to be to the unit, the institution, the larger environment: promoting collegial work environments, coaching for encounters with difficult conversations, and ensuring efficient processes and call systems for off-hours."

Provided by Henry Ford Health System

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