

How to avoid burnout among health care providers and improve self-care and wellness routines

October 14 2016

Emotional and physical burnout among physicians and other health care professionals is on the rise in recent years, according to studies which point to time pressures, exhaustion and heavy workload among the reasons. That's why enhancing wellness and resilience for health care providers and patients is the focus of the annual Urban Mental Health 2016 conference on Nov. 4 at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School. Rutgers Today talks with Rashi Aggarwal, associate professor and associate director of residency training and a consultation liaison psychiatrist in NJMS' Department of Psychiatry, about the signs of burnout and some practical strategies to avoid fatigue and boost wellness.

What does the latest research tell us about burnout among health care providers?

Aggarwal: The latest research finds that [burnout](#) is highly prevalent in about 50 percent of physicians, on average and across the different medical specialties. Burnout is highest among emergency room physicians. Burnout rates among [health care providers](#) have increased dramatically from 2011 to 2014, compared with the general population. And, satisfaction with life has correspondingly decreased among physicians.

What are some of the signs that tell providers they need to tend to their own physical and mental health?

Aggarwal: Burnout is easy to recognize. Some of the symptoms include emotional exhaustion, fatigue, poor sleep, apathy, forgetfulness, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, feeling disengaged from patients, co-workers and loved ones, and difficulty getting along with others. Persistence of such feelings can indicate burnout. If not addressed, burnout can have serious consequences, such as depression, anxiety, addiction and suicidal thoughts.

What wellness routines and skills can providers put into practice to strengthen their emotional resilience while caring for others?

Aggarwal: It is important for health care providers to take steps to build resilience ideally before burnout sets in. Getting adequate sleep, rest and exercise, eating healthy and avoiding long periods of sitting are critical. It is also important to practice gratitude and compassion and to focus on the positive aspects of life. Thinking about values at work and at home and ensuring that work is aligned with those values gives life meaning and builds resilience. It is also helpful to identify one's strengths and devote at least some time at work to activities that leverage those strengths.

What physical and outside-of-work activities are key to fostering personal and workplace wellbeing?

Aggarwal: Most of the techniques listed above should be practiced both at work and at home. Pay specific attention to relationships with loved ones. Disconnecting from work when at home and being present with

family helps to recharge. Making time for hobbies and interests, and working with your partner to align personal values with family values, helps bring meaning to life and reduces the chances of burnout.

Provided by Rutgers University

Citation: How to avoid burnout among health care providers and improve self-care and wellness routines (2016, October 14) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-10-burnout-health-self-care-wellness-routines.html>

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