

Professional coaching alleviates burnout symptoms in physicians

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Medical doctors in the United States are twice as likely to experience symptoms of burnout as other workers, which can compromise quality of care and place patients at risk. In a study in *JAMA Internal Medicine*,

Mayo Clinic researchers suggest a new approach to fighting burnout: external professional coaching.

Defined by the World Health Organization as "feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced professional efficacy," [burnout](#) creates problems for both physicians and the patients they treat. This study, led by Liselotte Dyrbye, M.D. and Colin West, M.D., Ph.D., investigates the use of external professional coaching—focused on professional goal setting, work choices, professional relationships, and influencing change at work—to reduce burnout. Though researchers have previously studied coaching in other contexts, this is the first study specifically exploring its effects on [physician burnout](#).

"Helping physicians navigate career decisions and manage the stress of their job is crucial," says Dr. Dyrbye. "While many of these doctors have a good informal support system, professional coaches can address a variety of topics and needs, and provide a safe setting to admit perceived vulnerabilities and uncertainties. We really think it can improve physicians' ability to manage their careers and change the detrimental aspects of their work environments, so that ultimately they can do their job well without feeling overwhelmed."

Participants—88 practicing physicians—began the study by filling out several self-assessment questionnaires, querying for burnout, quality of life, resilience, and job satisfaction. They then completed 6 sessions with a non-[physician](#) credentialed professional coach, who worked with the doctors on issues of their choice. After those six sessions, the physicians filled out the same questionnaires to chart their progress.

Results were promising. The doctors reported less burnout and a higher quality of life after coaching, as compared to before. Notably, the

researchers also administered these tests on physicians who were not coached. Across the same span of time, these physicians actually reported more emotional exhaustion and lower quality of life, showing how these symptoms can worsen if left unaddressed.

More research remains to be done on the efficacy of professional coaching when combined with other programs, but these results suggest it may be added to a growing list of evidence-based tools to support physicians and, by extension, the patients they serve. While useful, professional [coaching](#) should be offered in parallel to organizational efforts to improve the practice environment and address the underlying drivers of burnout among physicians.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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