



When Burnout Happens to Good Physicians

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An over-emphasis on efficiency, often characterized by attempting to handle too much at once, can lead to burnout. It's not surprising that burnout is a common problem encountered by physicians.

Many physicians proceed as if they can handle everything that is thrown to them, as long as they stay focused. This is embodied by the physician who wants to increase his practice's quarterly volume by 12 percent, inspire the staff, speak at numerous symposiums, spend more time with his spouse and kids, rise to an even greater position of community prominence, and maintain peak fitness.

These physicians harbor the notion that if they can find a way to work more efficiently, they'll be able to "get it all done." So, they race through some tasks as fast as possible, slow down a bit for others, rarely pause and reflect, and remain in that mode for hours or days or weeks on end. When doing things rapidly doesn't seem to be enough, they stay on the job longer each day.

Sound familiar?

Here are a few things to keep in mind next time you find yourself rushing through tasks or working late hours:

1. Life is a marathon

To be sure, there are times when it makes sense to put in an extra long day. Still, when weekly work hours start to stack up and cut into your personal time, stress, anxiety, and exhaustion are all too predictable. The stakes seemingly increase, as your perspective decreases.

Try to remember the bigger picture. Sometimes staying late to complete that last task is not worth it.

2. Finding your own balance is key

Some people fall into the “I must do it all” trap because they don’t trust others. Some fall because they have no inkling of how to delegate effectively. Others succumb because they know of peers who put in exorbitantly long hours. So, that must be the only way to approach one’s practice.

The key is to create and maintain a sense of balance that works for you.

3. Slowing down can help

Sometimes it seems as if the energy and effort you expend at getting organized will be a waste. After all, if you’re already feeling behind and have much to accomplish, wouldn’t good time management necessitate simply jumping in and handling those things that beg for your attention? Not exactly. Often, you have to slow down in order to speed up.

In general, being organized greatly enhances your ability to manage your time thereafter. Knowing where items are located on file or on disk puts you in charge, and provides freedom to concentrate on creative, fulfilling, or necessary tasks such as treating patients, and not on the clutter that surrounds you.