

Lyra

Combating Burnout and Compassion Fatigue for Health Care Workers

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Dr. McDougall (she/her) is a licensed clinical psychologist. She supervises, teaches, and trains therapists in evidence-based and culturally responsive therapy. She has worked with a variety of clinical populations including veterans and humanitarian aid workers deployed globally to active crises. Dr. McDougall is specially trained in clinical and community psychology and emotionally focused couples therapy, and has developed couples and family training programs.

What is burnout?



**Work-related stress syndrome resulting
from chronic exposure to job stress**

What is compassion fatigue?

A state of emotional and physical exhaustion from prolonged exposure to the suffering of others, particularly in caregiving professions



How widespread is burnout in health care professions?

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy recently declared health care burnout a crisis.¹

More than half of doctors surveyed said they're feeling burned out²

66%
of nurses are considering resigning due to burnout¹

53%
of health care workers have reported at least one symptom of a mental health condition³

Suicide rates for health care workers far exceed those of the general population⁴

¹ [Health Worker Burnout - Current Priorities of the U.S. Surgeon General](#)

² [I Cry but No One Cares: Physician Burnout & Depression Report 2023](#)

³ [Symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation among state, tribal, local, and territorial public health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

⁴ [Physician Suicide: A Call to Action](#)

Is the pandemic the main reason for medical burnout?

- The pandemic played a large role in medical burnout due to long hours, stressful working conditions, and the high death toll
- This is linked to situations that create severe moral distress, emotional exhaustion, and mental health issues
- During the pandemic:
 - 40% of surveyed health care workers developed PTSD¹
- But burnout rates were high among health care professionals even before COVID-19

¹[Symptoms of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation among state, tribal, local, and territorial public health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Why is burnout so prevalent among health care professionals?

- Emotional trauma
- Workplace violence and harassment
- Irregular and long work hours
- Compassion fatigue
- Anxiety and stress
- Administrative burdens
- Lack of organizational support, workplace learning, and access to mental health care
- Work overload from caring for too many patients with limited staff and resources

What impact has burnout had on health systems?



**Diminished
engagement and
productivity**



**Rising turnover
rates**



**Challenges with
patient care**

What builds resilience in frontline health workers?



Resilience is the ability to successfully adapt in the face of challenge or adversity

Factors that may decrease burnout in frontline workers:

- Adapting to challenges
- Sense of purpose
- Emotional regulation
- Seeking professional support

What are barriers to mental health care in clinical settings?

Mental health stigma

Forgoing help due to fears about medical licensing boards

Lack of access to mental health care

What is culturally responsive care (CRC) and why is it important?

CRC is a philosophy that guides mental health providers toward fully seeing and valuing clients for all aspects of their identity, background, and experiences, making mental health care more accessible and effective.

- CRC improves access to mental health services
- Individuals are more likely to seek help without fear of judgment
- Cultural factors significantly shape how individuals experience mental health concerns



How can HR leaders align their mental health strategies with WHO guidelines?

WHO's Guidelines for Mental Health at Work

**Prevent
work-related
mental health
conditions by
preventing risks
to mental health
at work**

**Protect and
promote mental
health at work**

**Support workers
with mental
health
conditions to
participate and
thrive in work**

**Create an
enabling
environment for
change**



**Acknowledge traumatic events
and initiate changes**



Seek input on support needs



**Design work for stress
reduction**



Offer mental wellness programs



Combat stigma proactively



Create safe spaces



Discuss mental health resources



Incorporate specialized mental health services



Provide training and education for staff



Integrate technology for accessible support



Build robust mental health services

How can comprehensive mental health benefits help the entire health system?



Retention



Attract top talent



**Crisis prevention
and response**



**Reduce mental
health-related
leaves**

Thank You

