



6 Strategies for Preventing Clinician Burnout with Digital Care

By Erika del Pozo, MOT, OTR

Overview

Burnout is one of the largest challenges facing the healthcare industry, affecting healthcare providers at every level. While the pandemic was a major factor in compounding the problem, burnout rates have continued to remain high across provider demographics, ranging from 56 percent for nurses to 46 percent for nonclinical staff.¹

Many healthcare providers state that they plan to leave their jobs within the next two years, setting up the potential for an even bigger problem down the road in settings that are already dealing with clinical capacity issues. In addition to this concern, providers experiencing burnout are more likely to make dangerous mistakes, putting patients and organizations at risk.² But the good news is that innovative tools for mitigating burnout do exist. Digital care is growing in popularity as a highly successful, cost-effective strategy that can lower burnout rates and prevent the vicious cycle of low morale, staff attrition, and diminished outcomes.

This eBook will dive into:

- 1 How employee burnout can create a dangerous ripple effect.
- 2 The most common factors that contribute to burnout.
- 3 Six expert strategies for reducing burnout at your organization.

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The Ripple Effect of Employee Burnout

Burnout in healthcare has emerged as a critical and pervasive problem, casting a shadow over the well-being of healthcare providers and the quality of patient care. The demanding nature of the healthcare industry, coupled with long working hours and intense pressure, contributes to the prevalence of burnout among clinicians across all settings.

The consequences of burnout are profound and far-reaching. Diminished job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and a sense of depersonalization are common repercussions, leading to a decline in the overall mental health of healthcare workers. This not only jeopardizes their own well-being but also compromises patient safety and outcomes. The risk of medical errors rises as employees experiencing burnout struggle with focus in the face of high stress.

Moreover, burnout contributes to high turnover rates within the healthcare workforce, exacerbating the existing shortage of skilled professionals. The nature of burnout within the healthcare system perpetuates a detrimental cycle, affecting both individual practitioners and the broader healthcare ecosystem.

Addressing burnout requires systemic changes, including integrating professional self-care, enhanced support systems, and a reevaluation of the expectations placed on healthcare professionals. Prioritizing mental health resources, fostering a culture of open communication, and implementing measures to mitigate stress are essential steps toward ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the healthcare workforce.

What Is Burnout?

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. Employees experiencing burnout might show signs of:

Emotional exhaustion: Depletion of emotional and physical resources without any source of replenishment and recovery.

Cynicism: A negative or depersonalized view toward the recipients of care; emotional buffer of detached concern.

Decreased self-efficacy: Low personal accomplishment that reduces a worker to feeling incompetent.³



How Burnout Impacts Organizations, Patients, and Providers

Consequences for Organizations

- **Reduced productivity and efficiency:** Burnout diminishes the ability of clinicians to perform at their best, leading to decreased productivity and efficiency. Fatigued and disengaged staff may struggle to meet performance expectations. At the same time, over-engaged staff can also experience burnout, which can be masked as being overly engaged with one's work.
- **High turnover rates:** Burnout contributes to high rates of staff turnover as clinicians seek relief from job requirements that feel unmanageable. For organizations, continually recruiting and training new personnel is not only expensive but also disrupts the continuity of patient care.
- **Increased healthcare costs:** The combination of decreased productivity and high turnover results in increased healthcare costs for organizations. Recruiting and training new staff, as well as dealing with potential medical errors associated with burnout, adds financial burdens. According to the 2022 NSI National Health Care Retention & RN Staffing Report, the average cost of replacing a nurse is \$52,350 and each percentage change in nurse turnover costs or saves the average hospital an additional \$380,600 per year.⁴



\$52K+

The average cost of replacing a nurse is **\$52,350**.

How Burnout Impacts Organizations, Patients, and Providers

Continued

Consequences for Patients

- **Compromised quality of care:** Burnout can lead to a decline in the quality of patient care. Fatigued and emotionally exhausted clinicians are more prone to medical errors that can impact patient safety and outcomes.⁵
- **Decreased patient satisfaction:** Burnout often leads to depersonalization and reduced empathy among healthcare providers, affecting the patient-provider relationship. Lower levels of patient satisfaction can result from a perceived lack of attentiveness and compassion.
- **Delayed access to care:** Overworked healthcare professionals may struggle to meet demand, resulting in delayed access to care for patients. Longer wait times and decreased availability of appointments can negatively impact patient health.

Consequences for Clinicians

- **Impaired mental and physical health:** Burnout takes a toll on clinicians' mental and physical health, contributing to conditions such as depression, anxiety, and other stress-related disorders. This not only affects their quality of life but also increases healthcare costs due to the need for treatment.
- **Decreased professional satisfaction:** Burnout diminishes professional satisfaction and fulfillment among healthcare providers. The passion and dedication that initially drew individuals to the healthcare profession may wane, contributing to the cycle of staff attrition.⁶
- **Higher risk of professional errors:** Fatigue and emotional exhaustion increase the likelihood of professional errors, including medical mistakes that could put patients at risk or damage the clinician's reputation.



What Causes Burnout— And What to Do

Here are six main factors that contribute to healthcare staff burnout and what you can do to mitigate it at the organizational level.

Problem: Work Overload

In healthcare, workload can be measured by two main benchmarks: volume of tasks (for example, a provider's caseload and schedule) and quality of tasks (which might include performing tasks outside of one's scope of practice and/or job expectations). Productivity standards are generally defined by how quickly patients are moving through the door, and can be broken down into hard metrics and soft metrics: the number of patients seen in a day vs. patient satisfaction and quality of care.

Solutions to Work Overload

- Emphasize ethical and evidence-based practices.
- Survey employees anonymously about the ethical climate and organizational behavior.
- Don't solely measure productivity based on billable units; instead, include other measures such as patient satisfaction and professional growth.
- Involve clinicians in developing productivity goals related to leadership, clinic growth, patient outcomes, attitude, and continuing education.

Did you know? Productivity standards that are too high are correlated with increased observed unethical behavior.⁷

What Causes Burnout— And What to Do

Continued

Problem: Lack of Control

When providers have low control over the structure and schedule of their jobs, this can lead to a sense of powerlessness and burnout, especially when a high level of stress is already present.

Solutions to Lack of Control

- Promote active participation in organizational decision-making to encourage greater levels of efficacy.
- Allow greater flexibility with scheduling and managing caseload.
- Practice *job crafting*, which allows employees to make self-initiated changes in the design of their job to better allow for their individual strengths, needs, and working preferences. You can learn more about job crafting in the course [Burnout in Health Care: Causes, Impact, and Solutions](#).

Tips for Providers Experiencing Burnout

Regardless of the cause of a clinician's burnout, practicing these habits can help:

- ✓ Take breaks between patients. It can be as simple as taking one mindful breath in and out before seeing your next patient.
- ✓ If you regularly eat a quick lunch at your desk, have lunch with coworkers sometimes or go outside at least a few times a week.
- ✓ Step outside when you're able to and expose yourself to nature/sunlight.
- ✓ Talk with your manager about setting aside dedicated documentation time.
- ✓ Make time for laughter and humor when appropriate.

Problem: Insufficient Reward

When we think of job-related rewards, we often think of financial returns, but there are two other important types of rewards as well: status-related (such as job security and the opportunity for a promotion) and socioemotional in the form of high esteem and recognition. Without appropriate and sufficient status-related and socioemotional rewards, employees can quickly lose motivation.

A recent study of occupational therapists found a **direct relationship between socioemotional rewards and high levels of professional efficacy**.⁸

Solutions for Insufficient Reward

- Ensure that expectations are clear and explicit.
- Provide the materials, equipment, and other tools necessary for job success.
- Enable and empower employees to do their best, learn, and grow.
- Consistently give employees recognition and praise for doing good work.
- Foster a culture of mentorship in which employees feel that supervisors care about them as individuals and encourage their career and personal development.
- Listen to and consider employee feedback.

What Causes Burnout— And What to Do

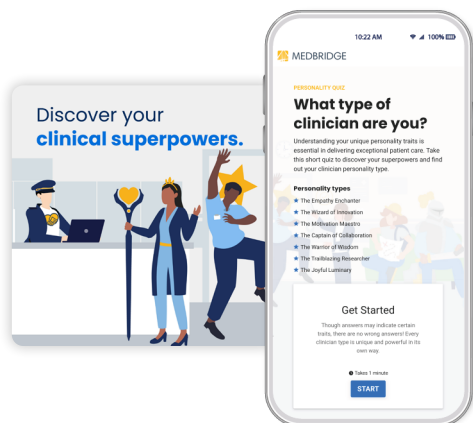
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Problem: Breakdown of Community

The single-most important factor in team success or failure is the quality of relationships on the team. When this suffers, employees are much more likely to develop cynicism, low morale, and burnout.

Solutions to Breakdown of Community

- Help cultivate a positive work culture where concrete *appreciation languages* among co-workers can take root. Appreciation languages help employees feel an ongoing sense of social support. They might include words of affirmation, acts of service, gift giving, or quality time together, such as shared coffee or lunch breaks.
- Consider having employees take a personality test such as the [MedBridge Clinician Type Quiz](#) as a way to improve mutual understanding and communication. When co-workers have insight into their own traits and those of others, they're better equipped to navigate differences, compromise, and help each other.



Problem: Unfairness and Injustice

Fairness in the workplace refers to the extent to which decisions at work are perceived as being fair and people are treated with respect. Mutual respect is central to a shared sense of community at work. In an unfair work environment, employees might experience inequity of workload or pay, cheating on the part of other employees, inappropriately handled evaluations and promotions, dispute resolutions where neither party has a voice, and even workplace bullying. Situations like these can lead to lowered work engagement, high absenteeism, high turnover, lowered performance, and increased errors.

Solutions to Lack of Fairness

- Avoid an “us vs. them” mentality.
- Foster a culture of positivity to reduce interpersonal misconduct.
- Practice effective conflict management.
- Develop and clearly communicate a policy prohibiting any manifestation of bullying.
- Implement conflict mediation and coaching.
- Create a feedback system between staff and management.
- Include self evaluations in annual performance reviews.
- Promote job autonomy and self-efficacy to help employees feel empowered.

What Causes Burnout— And What to Do

Continued

Problem: Significant Value Conflicts

As Stephen Hawking said, “Work gives you meaning and purpose, and life is empty without it.” Meaning is the ultimate employee retention strategy: When employees are able to work toward a meaningful personal goal that also aligns with their organization’s mission, there is high value congruence. On the flip side, value conflicts can arise when there’s a discrepancy between the work an employee wants to do and the work they have to do. If employees experience this type of conflict, they can lose energy, motivation, and focus.

Value conflicts can occur if:

- There’s a larger focus on the bottom line than on the quality of patient care or staff well-being.
- An employee feels pressured by their job to do things they feel are unethical or not in line with their moral code.
- Employees experience role ambiguity.
- There’s a significant discrepancy between an organization’s mission statement and actual practice.
- An employee’s aspirations don’t align with their organization’s values and mission.

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Solutions to Value Conflicts

- Define and discuss explicit and implicit expectations with new hires, and revisit the discussion regularly.
- Allow for job crafting, the practice of allowing employees to better tailor their roles to their individual needs and strengths.
- Bring back former patients to share testimonials so that clinicians have greater visibility into how much of a difference they make in the lives of their patients.
- Develop and encourage a culture of positivity, good communication, individual autonomy, collaboration, and mutual respect.

Learn more about the six causes of burnout and how to implement these solutions in the course [Team and Organizational Interventions for Burnout in Health Care](#).



How Digital Care Tools Help

Because digital care tools are scalable, effective, and highly customizable, they offer a powerful way to mitigate healthcare provider burnout. The right digital tools can help improve efficiency, reduce administrative burdens, and enhance overall staff well-being. Here are several ways in which digital care tools can be instrumental:

Streamlined Documentation

Digital tools can automate and streamline documentation processes, reducing the time and effort spent on paperwork. This allows healthcare providers to focus more on patient care and less on administrative tasks, alleviating a significant source of burnout.

Training and Education Platforms

Continuous learning and professional development are crucial for healthcare providers. Digital platforms that offer convenient and engaging training opportunities can contribute to professional growth and job satisfaction, reducing burnout.

Telehealth and Remote Monitoring

Telehealth platforms and remote monitoring tools enable healthcare providers to offer virtual consultations and monitor patients remotely. This can enhance flexibility in scheduling, reduce the need for travel, and provide more convenient care options, ultimately reducing the stress associated with a demanding schedule.

Platforms That Improve Provider-Patient Communication

Digital care platforms such as online home exercise programs and patient mobile apps can make it much easier for providers to track patient progress, receive feedback on pain and difficulty, and communicate between in-person appointments. This allows providers to improve rapport with patients and intervene more quickly if problems arise, elevating quality of care and patient satisfaction.

Online Burnout Prevention Education

Healthcare leaders can provide clinicians with easy-to-access online information and resources to help them with self-care and burnout mitigation. Incorporating wellness, mental health, and communication training into online education programs can also help providers learn valuable strategies for stress reduction, self-advocacy, and collaboration. Training can be tailored to the unique challenges faced by an organization's providers and be distributed to managers and other leaders as well to help encourage a positive workplace culture on all levels.

Help Providers Beat Burnout with Targeted Training

This three-part course series and free worksheets from experts Phil Plisky and Jenna Gourlay help clinicians optimize their career and avoid job burnout. [View Course](#)



How MedBridge Can Help

MedBridge provides a comprehensive digital platform for helping organizations prevent and mitigate staff burnout. Our targeted, proven approach helps engage and retain staff with targeted clinical education, soft skill and leadership training, and advanced specialty programs.

Evidence-Based Staff Retention Solution

Ensure competency with standardized onboarding, identify and remediate gaps in performance with targeted education, and create clinical ladders to develop and maintain strong leaders who are loyal to your organization.

[For hospitals and health systems](#)

[For private practices](#)

Targeted Training on Burnout Prevention

Designed for healthcare leaders and clinicians, our expert-led courses on healthcare staff burnout help participants gain a strong understanding of how burnout develops and the wide-ranging consequences it can have, while providing actionable, step-by-step methods for preventing and reducing it.

[View Courses](#)



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Erika del Pozo, MOT, OTR/L, holds a BA in dance and a master's degree in occupational therapy from Nova Southeastern University. Erika has practiced in outpatient pediatrics for five years and also has experience working with older adults with progressive neurological conditions. Erika served as an adjunct professor at Nova Southeastern University for three semesters, collaborating with Dr. Lambdin-Pattavina to teach occupational analysis and human interactions. Erika's special interests include promoting work well-being and preventing burnout in health care. She is CEO and founder of Joy Energy Time, a company that offers wellness resources to health care professionals. She is also the creator and cohost of the Burnt Out to Lit Up Podcast, a holistic wellness podcast for health care professionals. Erika has worked with several distinguished continuing education agencies, creating short and long evidence-based courses around holistic and multilevel approaches to address burnout and mental health in health care. She has also presented on the topic of burnout at regional and national occupational therapy conferences.

About MedBridge

Combining powerful digital patient care tools with the highest quality education, MedBridge is committed to making healthcare better for both providers and patients. Organizations across the care continuum use MedBridge to provide an enriched, digitally enabled experience that engages patients while streamlining and simplifying care. Designed with over a decade of insight from more than 300,000 clinicians and 25 million patients, MedBridge has helped thousands of organizations realize better patient outcomes. [Learn more.](#)

See how MedBridge can help your organization.

[Contact us to request a demo.](#)