

# Burnout

*Physician burnout is a long-term stress reaction characterized by depersonalization, including cynical or negative attitudes toward patients, emotional exhaustion, a feeling of decreased personal achievement and a lack of empathy for patients.'*

Okanlawon 2015

A Beyond Blue report (2019) found that doctors reported higher rates of burnout than the general population.

There are both individual and systemic risk factors for developing burnout.

## WHAT DOES BURNOUT LOOK LIKE?



**Needing more time than usual to unwind from work**



**Feeling irritable with colleagues and patients**



**Sarcasm**



**Not feeling satisfied with your job**



**Feeling tired even after sufficient sleep**

## FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO WORKPLACE BURNOUT:\*

- A lack of balance in your career/family/study life
- Problems with relationships with senior colleagues
- Fear of making mistakes
- Professional isolation
- Low morale amongst staff
- Long and irregular work hours
- Lack of flexibility in rostering
- Excessive workload and workload inefficiencies
- Exposure to occupational violence and patient suicide
- High number of challenging patients
- Lack of supervision
- Psychiatry not being your first career choice.

\*Shanafelt & Noseworthy 2017,  
Jovanović et al 2016

# Impact of burnout

Burnout not only affects personal wellbeing, but also affects patient care and the efficacy of the health care system in which we work.

Some of the impacts are:

- impaired patient satisfaction and increased medical error
- reduced learning capacity
- stress-related health problems
- impact on personal and workplace relationships
- low retainment of staff in psychiatry.

**“...to see human suffering and need all around oneself and to constantly be on the teeter-totter of other-care vs. self-care... demands its own kind of resilience. To be successful in the helping professions, we must continually maintain professional vitality and avoid depleted caring.”**

Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison 2016



## COMPASSION FATIGUE

Helping people can be very rewarding, and even addictive, but it's important to not overstretch your compassion as it can leave you feeling fatigued.

## PHYSICAL FATIGUE

Check if you are at risk of fatigue with the AMA's [fatigue risk assessment tool](#).

**Keeping Yourself Well**

For more support and information visit  
[ranzcp.org/support](https://ranzcp.org/support)



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# How to combat burnout

Recognise that you may be burnt out.  
Take a [burnout questionnaire](#) and/or speak to your GP about how you have been feeling.

## SELF CARE

Practicing effective self-care techniques such as mindfulness and regular debriefing are vital to helping you renew your energy.

## BOUNDARIES

Develop clear boundaries between your role as a doctor and that of a friend or partner.

Write down stressful events you experienced that day and throw the paper away before heading home.

Build a relaxing activity into your routine to help transition into the social part of your day.

Know your limits. Consider taking some leave, exploring some time in a non-clinical role, or consider a break in training. Your mental health is a priority.

## CONNECT

Your professional and social networks work to protect you from burnout.

Use your colleagues for support and debriefing.

Join a peer support group or Balint group. Consider joining the [RANZCP Mentoring Program](#).

Prioritise time with your family and friends and allow these relationships to help you unwind.

## GET INVOLVED

Many of the factors that lead to burnout in doctors are related to the system you work in. Have you thought about participating in your local service to support positive workplace change? Evidence suggests this can help you feel more empowered and tackle burnout.

For more information on effective workplace change, have a look at the [HeadsUp](#) webpage or the AMA module on [Creating the Organizational Foundation for Joy in Medicine™](#) for ideas to take to your leadership team.

## CELEBRATE

Acknowledge gains, even the small ones.

Celebrate personal and professional achievements.

Reflect on your role and the positive impact this can have on another's life.

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