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Physician Burnout: A Leading Indicator of Health Performance and “Head-Down” Mentality in Medical Education—I



To the Editor: In the editorial by Olson¹ published in the November 2017 issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, we are alerted toward the looming, seemingly untenable malady of physician burnout by the author’s underscoring the fact that creative approaches must be applied to address this critical issue.

Parenthetically, similar to the United States,² in some relatively recent studies from other parts of the world, a comparative assessment has revealed a similar, if not higher, prevalence of dissatisfaction with work among practicing physicians.³⁻⁵ These similar findings confirm that physician burnout is a critical *pandemic* rather than an epidemic confined only to the United States. Hence, without undermining the need for transformation of the health care system, a more pragmatic, quick, and sustainable approach to address this issue should be geared toward providing physicians at any level of their career anywhere on the planet with a “tool bag” for self-care.

The imminent answer to burnout is an individual and proactive strategy

with a goal to equip health care professionals at any level of their career (starting at or even before medical school) with practical tools to transform the debilitating effects of day-to-day stress into clarity of vision and practical creativity.

This goal can be easily and effortlessly accomplished through various ancient holistic self-care techniques that enable us to make a critical choice in a critical situation while the organizational changes take the time needed to be implemented. Studies have shown that such a strategy significantly improves Maslach Burnout Inventory scores for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (the 3 major domains of physician burnout).⁶⁻⁸

Einstein said, “we cannot solve our problems with the same level thinking that created them.” With a wide variation in the structure and function of health care organizations all over the world plus various stages in the journey of a health care provider (from being a medical student to even an organizational executive), the answer is not “within the matrix” but outside it. Self-care converts disillusionment in the individual health care professional into vigor, dedication, and absorption in work.

My experience over the past 9 years and the published reports⁹ have revealed this intervention to be a low-cost, engaging, time-efficient way to improve well-being and manage physician burnout symptoms by providing user-friendly tools that health care professionals can apply to their own care as well as the care of their patients. Ultimately, we take the same mind (equipped with the toolkit) with us wherever we go!

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Physician Burnout: A Leading Indicator of Health Performance and “Head-Down” Mentality in Medical Education—II



To the Editor: Regarding the editorial by Olson¹ published in the November 2017 issue of *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, the author observes the importance of physical and psychological burnout within the context of the modern health system. She asserts that physicians are “exiting their careers in medicine faster than they enter.” Despite current measures to reduce physician burnout, Shanafelt