Burnout

Promoting Well-Being and Recognising Burnout
What is Burnout?

Burnout is high amongst doctors compared to many other professions. It is a set of features which relates specifically to work. There are three main features that define burnout:

- **Emotional exhaustion:** Emotional depletion from work overload.
- **Depersonalisation:** A sense of being unfeeling towards patients or peers. Often negative, detached responses.
- **Professional efficacy:** A reduced sense of competence or achievement in work. Loss of your 'sense of meaning' at work.

Burnout not only impacts on performance at work but is recognized to have a negative impact on an individual's personal life. Individuals experiencing significant burnout may feel a desire to leave the profession, are at higher risk of substance abuse and are likely to experience personal conflict in relationships. Doctors experiencing burnout are more likely to make medical errors and ultimately this can impact on patient care.

Why does it happen?

There are a variety of factors which can contribute to burnout. These include challenges within the system which we work, the specialty we practise, patients we are looking after and our own personality traits.

Burnout is different from stress. Stress is ‘a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from adverse circumstances’. However burnout encompasses a variety of additional adverse features, often in the context of a stressful working environment. Stress often comes in peaks and a certain amount of stress is helpful to optimize productivity. However if we are dealing with high stress environments, on an ongoing basis, this can result in exhaustion and can increase the likelihood of burnout.
What can I do about it?

When we are busy and tired it can sometimes be difficult to take time to think about whether the way we are feeling, and how we are behaving, is a normal response to stresses and strains or whether it is problematic.

Some questions to ask are:

- Does your job have an excessive workload?
- Do you feel out of control when dealing with work?
- Do you feel that your organization manages issues fairly?
- Are you finding it difficult to manage stressful situations?
- Are you struggling to make time to do things you enjoy outside work and spend time with friends and family?
- Are you finding interactions with patients and families overwhelmingly challenging on a regular basis?
- Can you connect with your patients and their families?
The following are suggestions of strategies we can implement to reduce the chances of burnout:

1. Engaging in work. This promotes a sense of purpose.
2. Career planning and specialty choice based on career aspirations, personality and values.
4. Maintaining a life-work balance

If you are experiencing burnout it is important that you address it. Professional support is available. Techniques which have been shown to be effective in helping with burnout include:

1. Mindfulness and reflective practice.
2. Relaxation.
If you are recognising that you may be experiencing burnout it is important that you access support.

Your educational and clinical supervisors are there to support you.

The Professional Support Unit (PSU) is there to support trainees through difficulties or concerns and to provide development opportunities for trainees. You can contact the team directly yourself.

You can contact NIMDTA on 0289040000 to speak with the PSU team. Further information is also available through the NIMDTA website at www.nimdta.gov.uk/professional-support

The services available to you at PSU include:

- Confidential 1:1 Support Meetings
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Confidential Counselling

If you are finding that your physical or mental well-being is being affected it is important that you access further professional support through Occupational Health or your GP.

You can also access confidential counselling services through Inspire (previously Carecall) on: **0800 389 5362**
Additional Resources

http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/feelingoverwhelmed.aspx

Burnout amongst doctors. Lemaire, J B; BMJ Editorials; July 2017. doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.j3360

https://improvement.nhs.uk/uploads/documents/NHS-8-high-impacts-A4v5Bm_with_stickynotes_5_7dglFbL.pdf
“what started out as important, meaningful and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling and meaningless. Energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness”

Elizabeth Maslach