



Reflecting on Physician “Burnout”

I was truly honored when Dr. Rena Yadlapati contacted me to discuss burnout and balance. Her essay in the previous issue has advice and wisdom beyond her years—read it and then read it again, as I did.

As we talked and I reflected on my years in training and early career, I realized we did not have the term burnout then, nor would we have had permission to use it. We were told to give 110% to work, we never questioned that work would come above all else, and we didn’t recognize the dysfunctional patterns all around us. As I read the literature on burnout a few years ago, I realized that it is inevitable for most of us to feel burned out at some time in our careers.

Here are 3 things to consider:

1. Sometimes you cannot say no, and you will have to work longer and harder. At those times look for satisfaction in other ways. I was told of a young pediatrician who keeps a file called “Why I Do This” in which he keeps cases of patients who have been meaningful to him.
2. Don’t underestimate the power of peer mentoring. Your colleagues may be one of the best support systems as they will “get it.”
3. Don’t wait for it to get better in the future. Try to live in the present and develop habits, behaviors, and thought patterns to cope with stress. You will need them for the rest of your life.

Remember the characteristics that predispose to burnout are those we want in our physicians: idealism, perfectionism, and a sense of responsibility. I am so thankful and proud of recent generations for changing the way we think about burnout, for the better for our profession and ultimately for our patients.

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