

All Levels of the Healthcare Workforce Suffer Burnout and Work Overload



During the pandemic many healthcare workers suffered from stress and burnout, contributing to workforce turnover. Although the focus was placed on physician and nurse burnout, a new study found that high rates of burnout and intent to leave the job was an issue across the entire healthcare workforce.

The cross-sectional survey, led by Brigham and Women's Hospital investigators, included over 15,000 physicians, 11,000 nurses as well as more than 5,000 other clinical staff, and over 11,000 non-clinical staff including housekeeping, administrative staff, lab technicians, or food service personnel.

The team analysed rates of burnout, intent to leave the job and work overload from respondents who participated in the American Medical Association's Coping with COVID Survey from April to December 2020.

The data suggested that healthcare workers felt unable to meet the unrealistic demands for productivity and efficiency, which were inevitably affecting their well-being and work intentions.

Approximately 50% of respondents reported burnout, with nurses reporting the highest levels (56%) as well as other clinical staff (54.1%). 28.7% of healthcare workers reported intent to leave the job. Of this percentage, 41% were nurses, 32.6% were non-clinical staff and 31.1% were clinical staff. Additionally, intent to leave was higher for physicians and nurses working in an in-patient setting.

Across all role types, work overload was a strong, independent predictor of burnout and intent to leave. Staff who suffered from work overload were almost three times more likely to experience burnout. Additionally, work overload was associated with a greater risk of intent to leave among all healthcare workers, including non-clinical staff.

The findings suggest that a more standardised approach to measuring and limiting workload could aid in reducing burnout and turnover intentions. Implementing the correct interventions to ensure employees have more control over their work environment is critical. Additionally, it is important that healthcare settings ensure adequate safeguards for mental and physical health, and provide mental health resources for all members of the workforce.

Lisa S. Rotenstein, a primary care physician at the Brigham and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, stated, "there are staffing shortages in healthcare facilities across the country and it's not just physicians. It is nurses, medical assistants, and more. We need to take care of all types of healthcare workers".

Therefore, it is imperative that more activities are undertaken to measure and modulate employees' workload to facilitate the sustainability of healthcare delivery.

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