

Nurse Burnout—Cause and Effect

Key insights to empower nurses



Frustration, loss of interest, emotional exhaustion, prolonged stress, feeling overworked and underappreciated, disengaged, and walking around with an empty tank. Everyone feels a little of this sometimes, but when these are the words used to describe how a nurse feels about her job, you know that nurse is experiencing burnout.

Why are nurses suffering more today?

Why are nurses suffering more today from burnout than ever before? There are many factors that contribute; most cases develop as a combination of causes. Long hours have been identified by many nurses as a key source—12 hour shifts, overtime, and being called in when staffing is short, can all add up to fatigue. Nurses have a calling to care for others, and often put others first before themselves. This means nurses sometimes neglect addressing their own needs or wellbeing, which over time, adds to the feeling of nursing burnout. Additional factors such as working in busy, high stress environments, coupled with dealing with sickness and death, also have a direct impact on the emotional compassion fatigue of nursing burnout.

Burnout in nurses has been called an epidemic and a health crisis by NPR’s Health news “Shot’s [Blog](#),” but is it really that bad? Left unchecked nurse, burnout can affect not only the health of the nurses, but also patient outcomes as identified by a February 2016 article published by AHRQ Patient Safety [network](#). Nurse burnout can negatively impact an organization’s productivity, efficiency, and quality of care. As a result, it is more important than ever for leaders to look for and identify the symptoms of burnout in their clinicians. Recognizing the red flags can help avoid a crisis situation.

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Leaders need to listen as well as watch. ***Symptoms of burnout may manifest as:***

- Disengagement
 - Nurses attitude may change
 - Their temperament may swing across the pendulum from positive to negative in a short span of time
- They may hold on to the same problems and complain consistently even when the situation has been resolved
- Clinicians may become tardy or absent more often, which is inconsistent with previous behavior
- There may be a decline in the quality of work or missed deadlines

Addressing burnout in an organization can increase your employee retention as well as the welfare of your patients. Hospitals across the country are implementing a variety of unique ways to reduce stress and relieve the causes of burnout. Some hospitals have begun pursuing magnet

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status from the American Nurses Credentialing Center as a way to gauge and improve nursing culture. Others are providing a separate area as a place to go to reduce stress during shifts. Some offer massage chairs, yoga mats, inspirational books, and a tabletop waterfall with relaxing CD's. Offering additional educational opportunities or credentialing programs can increase a nurse's self-worth and value in her job. Even something as simple as using therapy dogs in nursing stations can go a long way to relieving stress and creating a better nursing culture.

Clinician burnout can be found in hospitals and healthcare settings across the country. The good news is there is a wealth of information and resources available about how to spot and address these concerns. For example, *Hospitals and Health Networks (HH&N)* has published a variety of articles on the subject. A recently published article, *Nurse Burnout is a Public Health Crisis and Here are innovative ways Hospitals are addressing it*¹, provides specific examples of what several health systems are doing about it in their facilities. Other publications such as *Becker's Hospital Review* have compiled feedback from hospitals and healthcare systems on what they are doing to reduce burnout. An article written by Kelly Gooch² provides insight from three healthcare experts on the red flags for spotting unengaged employees in their hospitals. There are also several books written on the subject. One book in particular, written by Jennifer L. Carr, BSN, RN titled *HealThy Nurse*³, details her personal experiences of dealing with burnout and despair to ultimately find health and happiness, providing helpful insight for dealing with this critical issue from a personal perspective.

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Nursing burnout is almost inevitable in any hospital and healthcare system, but understanding how to spot the indicators, and address the causes, will help eliminate the stress and frustration, and keep your staff engaged.

References

¹<http://www.hhnmag.com/articles/7173-nurse-burnout-is-a-public-health-crisis-and-here-are-the-innovative-ways-hospitals-are-addressing-it>

²<http://www.beckershospitalreview.com/human-capital-and-risk/spotting-an-unengaged-employee-we-asked-3-experts-to-describe-red-flags.html>

³*HealThy Nurse - Escape Burnout and Discover the Ultimate Life/Work Balance* by Jennifer L. Carr, BSN, RN. Matilda Publishing 2006

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