

# Physician burnout

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CMAJ Podcasts: author interview at <https://soundcloud.com/cmajpodcasts/170827-five>

## 1 Burnout is a work-related syndrome that occurs in occupations where others' needs come first, and where there are high demands, few resources and a disconnect between workers' expectations and experiences<sup>1</sup>

Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or feelings of detachment and cynicism toward people and work, and a reduced sense of accomplishment.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the absence of burnout may be an indicator of physician wellness, which translates into engagement and satisfaction with work, and a sense of thriving in physical, emotional and social health.<sup>1,2</sup>

## 2 Many physicians experience symptoms of burnout, which often begin in medical school and increase during residency training<sup>2-5</sup>

Risk factors for burnout include organizational factors such as workload and lack of autonomy, and personal factors such as female gender.<sup>1-5</sup> Resources for physicians experiencing burnout are shown in Box 1.

## 3 Physicians with burnout experience its effects in both their professional and personal lives<sup>2-5</sup>

Burnout is associated with depression, suicidal ideation and substance abuse, as well as unprofessional behaviour, reduction in work hours and medical errors.<sup>2-5</sup>

## 4 Burnout is difficult to recognize and address in oneself and in colleagues

Few physicians who self-identify as burnt out seek outside help, and physicians are cautious about reporting distressed colleagues.<sup>2</sup> This is in part owing to perceived stigma, denial and avoidance as coping strategies, and concerns about licensing.<sup>2</sup>

## 5 Strategies to improve physician wellness should target organizations as well as individual physicians<sup>3-5</sup>

Two recent meta-analyses show that organization-directed interventions, such as increased autonomy and scheduling changes, are associated with a moderate but substantial reduction in physician burnout.<sup>4,5</sup> These interventions may be more effective than physician-directed ones, such as mindfulness training and stress-management techniques, although combined approaches are likely the most successful.<sup>4,5</sup>

### Box 1: Resources for physicians, residents and medical students experiencing burnout\*

Organization	Contact
Alberta Medical Association Physician and Family Support Program†	877 767-4637
Physician Health Program of British Columbia	800 663-6729
Doctors Manitoba Health and Wellness Program	204 237-8320
New Brunswick Medical Society Physician Health Program	888 453-7272
Newfoundland and Labrador Medical Association Physician Care Network	877 418-2181
Doctors Nova Scotia Professional Support Program	855 275-8215
Ontario Medical Association Physician Health Program	800 851-6606
Quebec Physicians Health Program	800 387-4166
Physician Support Program of Prince Edward Island	877 418-2181
Saskatchewan Medical Association Physician Health Program	800 667-3781

\*Other resources are available through the provincial professional associations of resident physicians and the offices of learner wellness within Canadian faculties of medicine.

†There are no organizations for Nunavut, the Northwest Territories or Yukon, but Alberta has an agreement with the Northwest Territories to provide some support.

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