

Medscape's 2021 Physician Burnout Report Finds Covid-19 Takes a Toll: Physician Happiness Plunges

Burnout Rates Highest in Female Physicians, Critical Care & Infectious Disease Specialties

NEW YORK, NEW YORK: JANUARY 25, 2021 – The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental and emotional well-being of physicians, with female physicians and those in critical care and infectious disease reporting among the highest rates during the pandemic, according to findings from *Death by 1,000 Cuts: Medscape National Physician Burnout and Suicide Report 2021*.

Click here for full report:

<https://www.medscape.com/2021-lifestyle-burnout>

Although burnout rates were stable from the previous year's report, at 42% overall, the level in women increased from 48% to 51% during the pandemic, while burnout in male physicians overall remained unchanged from 2019. More women than men also reported experiencing greater conflict juggling work and parental demands (42% versus 23%).

Burnout and the stress of the pandemic (personal risk, social distancing, financial uncertainty) appeared to diminish physicians' overall work life happiness, with only 49% reporting they were happy in 2020 versus 69% pre-pandemic. More than one-third (34%) reported feeling unhappy last year, compared with 19% in 2019.

Nearly 80% of physicians said they felt burned out prior to the pandemic, but one in five said their burnout emerged only last year. Critical care (51%), rheumatology (50%) and infectious disease specialists (49%) ranked among the highest in reporting burnout for the first time since Medscape began surveying on the issue in 2013.

More than 12,000 physicians across 29 specialties responded to the survey, conducted between August 30 and November 5, 2020. Burnout is described as long-term, unresolved, job-related stress leading to exhaustion, cynicism, detachment from job responsibilities, and lacking a sense of personal accomplishment.

Physician Depression: Impact on Relationships, Patient Care

Nearly three quarters of millennial physicians (25-39) and GenXrs (40-54) and two-thirds of boomers (55-73) said burnout has had a negative effect on their personal relationships.

As in previous years, of the 20% of physicians who said they were depressed, one in five physicians reported clinical depression, and more than two-thirds (69%) said they felt down (colloquial depression) during 2020. Of those reporting depression, 13% said they experienced suicidal thoughts, and 1% attempted suicide.

More than one-third of all physicians who report depression say it leads them to be more easily exasperated with patients, 24% are less careful when taking patient notes and 15% said depression results in them making errors they would otherwise not make.

Bureaucracy, Long Hours Remain Chief Causes of Burnout

Although Covid-19 exacerbated existing issues that have contributed to physician burnout over time, the stress of treating Covid-19 patients did not substantially increase burnout.

Instead, nearly two-thirds of doctors cited their long-standing problem of excessive bureaucratic demands, and more than one-third pointed to long hours (37%). Only 8% of doctors said the stress of treating Covid-19 patients was the primary cause of their burnout. Both male and female physicians cited work-life balance as their main concern, with 42% of physicians indicating that a more manageable schedule would help reduce burnout.

“The incidence of burnout and depression among physicians has been a concern for years, and the pandemic only made a bad situation worse”, said Leslie Kane, M.A., Senior Director, Medscape Business of Medicine. “This is especially true in front line specialties and in female physicians, whom we know have borne the brunt of at-home schooling and other disruptions. Post-pandemic, health care organizations and the medical community have an opportunity to re-think how best to support physicians so that we start to see meaningful reductions in burnout, depression and suicide rates moving forward.”

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Medscape Survey Methods

The 2021 Medscape National Physician Burnout & Suicide Report was completed by 12,339 U.S. physicians representing more than 29 specialty areas. Respondents were invited to respond to the online survey. The margin of error for the survey was +/- 0.88% at a 95% confidence level.

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