

**SPECIAL REPORT**



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## **RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF PHYSICIAN BURNOUT**

Nearly half of U.S. physicians—44%—report feeling burned out, with 59% citing too many bureaucratic tasks as the chief contributor.<sup>1</sup> This is a serious concern, because physician burnout can lead to patients suffering adverse events<sup>2</sup> or leave physicians unable to express empathy and compassion with their patients.<sup>3</sup> In this special report, NORCAL Group Risk Management Specialists help you identify the signs of physician burnout so you can address it before it harms your practice.



## PHYSICIANS MAY BE PRONE TO BURNOUT

Burnout happens in almost every job, but the nature of medical practice attracts personality types that may be more susceptible to it. There is general agreement in the medical literature that many physicians share personality qualities that can result in dysfunctional work patterns: perfectionism, inflexibility, persistence and a tendency to over-commit themselves.<sup>4,5</sup> Excessive demands on themselves and subsequent loss of control can be particularly difficult for individuals with these personality traits and can contribute to burnout.<sup>6</sup>

**BUT THERE IS MORE TO BURNOUT THAN HAVING A PERSONALITY THAT IS CONDUCIVE TO IT:**

[Burnout] is a systemic problem. It's not just that some physicians have high-risk personalities.<sup>7</sup>

Although burnout is a condition that occurs in one's work life, it also tends to affect relationships with family and friends.

### DEFINITION OF BURNOUT

The gold standard for measuring burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is a validated, 22-item assessment. The MBI assesses three main indicators of burnout:<sup>8</sup>

- 1 EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION** — Feelings of emotional overextension and exhaustion by work. Burnout causes the physician to feel the demands of the job are too great to meet.  
A physician might say: *"I feel burned out from my work."*
- 2 DEPERSONALIZATION** — Callous and impersonal reaction to those who are served on the job (patients, in the case of a physician). Burnout causes the physician to detach and become less sensitive to patients' needs.  
A physician might say: *"I really don't care what happens to my patients."*
- 3 PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT** — Feelings of incompetence, poor achievement and low motivation. Burnout causes the physician to doubt his or her self-worth and professional effectiveness.  
A physician might say: *"I have not accomplished many worthwhile things in this job."*



NORCAL MUTUAL RISK MANAGEMENT INSIGHT

## RECOGNIZING BURNOUT WARNING SIGNS

Burnout develops gradually, and initial, subtle warning signs can go unnoticed.<sup>9</sup> It is important to recognize these signs before things reach a crisis stage and lead to diminished quality of patient care. Signs to watch for include:<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>

### PHYSICAL SIGNS

- » Fatigue
- » Changes in appetite
- » Changes in sexual appetite or functions
- » Somatization

### EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- » Increased irritability, anger or aggressiveness
- » Difficulty concentrating
- » Emotional deadness
- » Cynicism and disillusionment
- » Loss of mental energy
- » Negative attitude about oneself or others

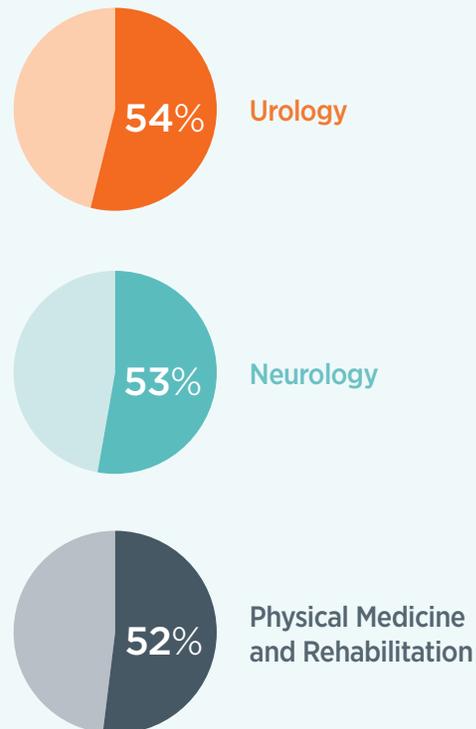
### LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- » Changes in normal sleep patterns
- » Procrastination or avoidance of decision-making
- » Chronic tardiness
- » Isolation from family, friends and colleagues
- » Self-medication

## PHYSICIAN SUICIDES IN THE U.S.

One doctor per day  
>2x the general population<sup>1</sup>

## SPECIALTIES WITH HIGHEST BURNOUT RATE<sup>1</sup>



## BURNOUT BY GENDER:<sup>1</sup>



**55%** of female physicians



**39%** of male physicians

This report is presented as a courtesy by NORCAL Mutual Insurance Company. Our Risk Management Specialists are always ready to help policyholders with risk issues and to support practice changes that lower risk and improve patient safety.

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