

a VITAL WorkLife article

# Physician Burnout: Balancing Caregiving and Self-Care

*How physician well being creates a ripple effect across organizations*



This is the first in a series of articles from VITAL WorkLife addressing physician well being solutions at multiple levels, from individual self-care to organizational support for physician well being.

According to the [2017 Physician & Advanced Practitioner Well Being Solutions Survey Report](#) by VITAL WorkLife and Cejka Search, physician well being has become broadly recognized as one of the top priorities for health system performance. Key findings included:

- 85.1% of physicians and advanced practitioners reported moderate to severe stress.
- Availability of well being solutions is limited in organizations and what is offered isn't necessarily what respondents value.
- 87.6% of physicians and advanced practitioners reported at least one barrier to well being solutions and more than half reported six or more barriers.<sup>1</sup>

*"There is a huge opportunity for us in health care to be more aware of this growing problem. Physicians have a tendency to brush burnout aside or try to deal with it in isolation because they fear it might threaten them professionally, making a problem into a crisis"*

—Robert Leschke, MD, Certified Professional Co-Active Coach

Pressure on physicians continues to rise, with escalating physician labor shortages compounded by more demanding care needs, negatively impacting physician well being.

Healthcare organizations also feel the impact acutely, through repercussions like increased patient safety issues, lower staff morale and increased turnover.

1. 2017 Physician & Advanced Practitioner Well Being Solutions Survey Report by VITAL WorkLife



## Potential Implications

Physician burnout is commonly associated with changes in healthcare and increased administrative demands. When physician well being is deficient, the effects on an organization can be profound. Not only are there significant financial costs when it comes to turnover, recruitment, malpractice claims and lower efficiency, but physician burnout also impacts both patients and other staff members.



*“When physicians are highly stressed or burned out, they may pull back or become irritable and other members of the team don’t feel as connected to them—this affects the culture of trust within an organization.”*

*—Liz Ferron, MSW, LICSW*

Physicians who are experiencing difficulties tend to be frustrated, brusque and impatient—negatively affecting morale and creating a workplace culture ranging from unpleasant to hostile.

Poor well being tends to follow a physician outside the clinic or hospital doors as well. Physicians may experience strained relationships with partners, children and other family members. They may feel less confident overall and experience a feeling of detachment. The shift from burnout to depression can happen easily, turning the issue into a chronic and life-altering problem.

Interested in learning more about how VITAL WorkLife can help physicians, physician leaders and healthcare systems?

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## From Caregiving to Self-Care

One of the first steps both organizations and physicians can take when addressing burnout is to recognize it's there, advises Dr. Leschke. Often, recognition can feel like a major relief to physicians who may be struggling through considerable stress.

*"Awareness and recognition can actually go a long way. From there, you can start to talk about how to address it. You can begin communicating in an open and change-oriented way."*

*—Robert Leschke, MD, Certified Professional Co-Active Coach*

Solutions focused on ways to encourage physicians to practice self-care while working to improve the culture can encompass:

- Physician well being resources, including physician peer coaching, coordinated referrals and support for physician family members
- Specialized consultants who can speak to issues such as anger management, substance abuse, documentation and other common sources of stress
- Web-based tools designed to build resiliency and identify burnout indicators
- Leadership development resources for organizational leaders and managers
- Facilitated workshops highlighting effective use of self-care strategies
- Time management with personal assistant support

Additional *insights* will address specific tactics helpful for physicians, and subsequent articles will cover what organizations can do to implement resources for long-term support.

### ABOUT VITAL WORKLIFE

VITAL WorkLife, Inc. is a national behavioral health consulting company supporting all dimensions of well being. Our healthcare solutions are designed specifically to meet the unique needs of physicians and providers. Our team of licensed master's and doctorate level senior consultants, physician peer coaches, psychiatrists and other specialists have deep experience in issues surrounding physician performance, satisfaction and retention. Our ultimate goal is to proactively help physicians and organizations address issues before they escalate to the point of affecting performance and patient safety.

