

How to Reclaim your Passion for Practice

By Barbara Wingate, MD

There is certainly a lot of talk about burnout, a very real and common condition for physician and providers, with significant trickle-down effects on patients, our loved ones and care teams. But so many of the drivers of burnout are related to issues we can do little about. However, learning to prioritize what you might be able to change, or improve, is helpful, without overly focusing on what you cannot control.

It is disheartening for me to think about how many physicians and providers are unhappy. I have had the fortune of treating many physicians and providers in my private practice and I also have the pleasure of coaching physicians and providers through VITAL WorkLife. These relationships work both ways. I pass on what I have learned about well being to them while learning from those in great pain about how to get to a better place.

How can you reclaim some of your own passion for practice even within the changing landscape of medicine?

Number one rule: Take care of yourself.

According to a survey conducted by [The Harris Poll](#), many physicians overlook their own self-care despite knowing that self-care is a vitally important part of health and overall well being. Lack of time, job demands, family demands, being too tired and burnout are the most common reasons for not practicing their desired amount of self-care. With all of the barriers to practicing self-care, you must dedicate some genuine authority and commitment to your practice (of self-care), or you will not sustain it. It requires discipline.

Bring Lightness and Humor to Your Life and Practice

If you don't practice self-care you will feel a sense of "heaviness"—as in you are carrying the weight of the world, which certainly affects how you behave and how others experience you.

Without self-care you lose your manners, your compassion, your curiosity, your listening skills, your important intuitive skills about patients or staff members—and what they need to succeed—for you to be a good team player. Very importantly, you lose your sense of humor. You don't have to be a joker—but humor gives us a lightness that is contagious and healing.

I have had the pleasure of seeing the Dalai Lama in person more than once. He smiles, laughs, wears a baseball cap and giggles. That is lightness of being personified. Read Norman Cousins's classic 1989 book on healing himself: [Headfirst: the Biology of Hope](#). We, as physicians, and other healthcare workers, can learn much from his wisdom. He uses funny movies to lighten up! Do you have a few in your toolkit? I have several and Sandra Bullock and Betty White often have a role. What else makes you feel light? Family? Books? Your kids? Pets? Friends?

How to Practice Self-Care

There are any number of ways to address self-care. Think about what you eat, how much sleep you get, your level of exercise and adding a purposeful practice of any form of meditation, spirituality or formal religious practices. Research related to physicians practicing meditation reveals the following findings:

- 1) Physician participation in a mindful communication program was associated with short-term and sustained improvements in well being and attitudes associated with patient centered care.
- 2) Participating in an abbreviated mindfulness training course adapted for primary care clinicians was associated with reductions in indicators of job burnout, depression, anxiety and stress.
- 3) Mindful physicians engage in more patient-centered communication and have more satisfied patients.

Use whatever works for you. Nature walks count. For instance, in Japan, these are called forest bathing and they are prescribed for stressed individuals!

Can you do a self-assessment to see what may have fallen by the wayside or what new things you can try? Set up your own plan for energy restoration or resilience upgrades. Ask yourself—do you want external support for navigating this path? With your VITAL WorkLife Well Being Resources, you have access to peer coaching, face-to-face counseling or in-the-moment telephonic support. A coach, like myself, can help you set up guidelines for finding much needed time for yourself, and chart a pathway to well being.

Number two rule: Follow the number one rule—take care of yourself.

National Doctor's Day is March 30th

National Doctor's Day is celebrated worldwide on various dates, and March 30th is the date in the U.S. What a perfect opportunity to reflect on why you went into medicine and start to bring some joy, lightness and fun back into your practice.

Whether you are a physician, advanced practice provider, in your residency, fellowship or in medical school, this is a wonderful profession and if you are not experiencing it in that way, then please go back to rule number one and take care of yourself.

Behave like the loving caring doctor you always wanted to be and still want to be. What goes around comes around... I am unabashedly proud to be a doctor and if all I get is a few kind words of appreciation on March 30th—well that is fine. I am doing this work because I want to and love it. In a time when so many are hurting, let's celebrate that you and I are able to be part of healing. Think of a way to compliment a colleague on National Doctor's Day—and every day.

We Can Help

As part of your [Well Being Resources](#) with VITAL WorkLife, you have access to peer coaching, face-to-face counseling or in-the-moment telephonic support. You can work with a coach to set up guidelines to find time for yourself and self-care. You also have access to [WorkLife Concierge](#), which can help you complete daily and special occasion tasks to help you make the most of your limited time.

Contact us at **877.731.3949** or through the [VITAL WorkLife App](#) to access your resources today.

[Here's an article on How to Use Your Peer Coaching.](#)

Sources

<https://info.vitalworklife.com/mindfulness-in-medicine-article-landing-page>