



[Print](#) :: [Close](#)

FAST FACTS AND CONCEPTS #169

Author(s): Linda Blust MD

Background *Fast Facts* #167 and 168 have described burnout, its risk factors, symptoms, and consequences. This Fast Fact will address strategies to avoid burnout while sustaining personal and professional health, integrity, and growth. *Fast Fact* #170 will describe assessment tools validated for burnout.

Individual Strategies

- Reflection upon work: journaling, discussion with colleagues.
 - Am I burned-out/healthy?
 - Why do I do this/continue to do this?
 - What inspired/moved/surprised me today?
- Attend to health: diet, exercise, rest, regular health care.
- Plan activities that rejuvenate: Play!
- Professional supervision: Regular interaction with a mental health professional with the express purpose of exploring dynamics of the provider/patient relationship.
- Make time for yourself
 - Plan vacations at regular intervals.
 - Allow for "time-out" when stressors increase.

Interpersonal Strategies

- Give important relationships priority – strengthen existing relationships with family and friends.
- Expand your community beyond existing relationships through activism or spiritual engagement.

Professional Strategies

- Debrief emotional events:
 - Reach out to colleagues.
 - Seek out or strengthen a mentor relationship.
 - Write about your work for a larger audience.
 - Utilize your institution's Critical Incident Response Team if available.
 - Psychosocial rounds with colleagues to explore these issues.
 - *Schwartz Center Rounds*: interdisciplinary hospital rounds to explore emotions surrounding provider/patient interactions.
- Advocate for change in your job, organization, or profession.

Triggers for Professional Counseling

- Persistent feelings of sadness, exhaustion, anger, worthlessness, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, or anxiety interfering with work or interpersonal relationships.
- Self-prescribing sedative/hypnotic medication.
- Substance abuse: alcohol, prescription, or non-prescription drugs.
- Other 'addictions' interfering with work/relationships: gambling, exercise.
- Persistent sleep disturbance: nightmares, difficulty initiating or staying asleep, early morning awakening.

- Loss of professional boundaries:
 - Inappropriate relationships with patients, families, or trainees.
 - Lack of attention to patients' rights, safety, or autonomy.

If, after careful attention to the variables within your control, you still feel burned-out and at risk for serious consequences, it may be necessary to temporarily or permanently leave your current job to regain your health.

References

1. Gundersen L. Physician burnout. *Ann Int Med.* 2001; 135:145-148.
2. Kuehn Kelly C. Strategies to Balance Training, Your Personal Life. *ACP-ASIM Observer.* 2001.
3. Meier DE, Back AL, Morrison RS. The inner life of physicians and care of the seriously ill. *JAMA.* 2001; 286:3007-3014.
4. Remen RN. The doctor's dilemma: returning service, grace, and meaning to the art of healing. *Whole Earth.* Summer 2000: 4-10.
5. The Kenneth B Schwartz Center. Available at: <http://www.theschwartzcenter.org/>.

Fast Facts and Concepts are edited by Drew A Rosielle MD, Palliative Care Center, Medical College of Wisconsin. For more information write to: drosiell@mcw.edu. More information, as well as the complete set of Fast Facts, are available at EPERC: www.eperc.mcw.edu.

Version History: This Fast Fact was originally edited by David E Weissman MD and published in November 2006. Current version re-copy-edited in April 2009.

Copyright/Referencing Information: Users are free to download and distribute Fast Facts for educational purposes only. Blust L. Health Professional Burnout – Part III. *Fast Facts and Concepts.* November 2006; 169. Available at: http://www.eperc.mcw.edu/fastfact/ff_169.htm.

Disclaimer: Fast Facts and Concepts provide educational information. This information is not medical advice. Health care providers should exercise their own independent clinical judgment. Some Fast Facts cite the use of a product in a dosage, for an indication, or in a manner other than that recommended in the product labeling. Accordingly, the official prescribing information should be consulted before any such product is used.

ACGME Competencies: Professionalism

Keyword(s): Psychosocial and Spiritual Experience: Patients, Families, and Clinicians

© 2008 Medical College of Wisconsin

Medical College of Wisconsin

8701 Watertown Plank Road, Milwaukee, WI 53226

www.mcw.edu | 414.456.8296

[Print](#) :: [Close](#)