Fatigue and Burnout in the Healthcare Industry

The healthcare industry is facing its own internal pandemic daily, with no sign of a cure in sight. Everyday healthcare providers loose highly skilled professionals to fatigue and burnout. Studies done on physicians speculate that well over half of all practicing physicians experience at least one symptom of burnout, a startling revelation that many experts did not see coming.

The Many Faces of Fatigue

Fatigue manifests in many ways, in almost every facet of the healthcare profession. From surgeons to CNAs, large percentages of these groups report fatigue in more ways than one. Physical fatigue plagues tens of thousands in the healthcare world, with many people having to work 80 hours a week. This fatigue has been shown to impact decision making, performance in stressful situations, and the social lives of those that experience it. Physical fatigue is not alone however, emotional fatigue also finds it way easily into the bodies and minds of healthcare professionals every single day. Not only does emotional fatigue lead to various forms of depression, it can also lead to the loss of personal relationships and upset work-home balances that play a key role in mental fortitude.

The Truth Behind Burnout

Burnout can manifest in almost any profession, hobby, sport, or activity. When something is done too much for too long, burnout will creep in. In the healthcare world this is all too prevalent, with all spectrums of the healthcare workforce reporting burnout on levels never seen before. But what exactly does burnout look like? Burnout can manifest in

various ways, from physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach-aches to emotional symptoms such as sporadic crying and depression.4 All these factors can easily be found in any busy hospital or practice around the United States. As healthcare providers rush to save other's lives and find cures for new diseases, they are also fighting a war from within.

What's Causing This?

The dramatic increase in fatigue and burnout can be contributed to many factors. Of these, increased demand on healthcare providers to provide top tier care might be one of the leading causes. With a shortage of MDs, RNs, and PAs already hurting the healthcare industry in America, the call for higher quality care only puts more weight on the shoulders of already stressed professionals. This compounding stress is also not aided by the fact that more patients walk into clinic doors every day. With issues like heart disease, obesity, and high blood pressure being some of the leading causes of death in the United States, professionals begin to feel the overbearing pressure of treating these diseases every day all day.

What's Being Done?

Numerous providers are implementing systems to help combat the rise of fatigue and burnout. However, with the rise of COVID-19, healthcare workers are more stressed than they have ever been, with programs to help stress seemingly put on the back burner until the swell of cases dies down to a manageable number. No doubt fatigue and burnout will be the talk of the industry in the coming years.

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Hospitals in the Future will Change Within the United States

Thoughts of what our future will look and be like are always fun to entertain. We often drift off to ideas of flying cars, robot butlers, and what society will look like. Very seldom do we entertain the idea of what healthcare, and more specifically, hospitals will look like in the near future. As advances in medicine continue to be made and people continue to live longer, it may seem impossible to envision what the future has in store.

Less is More?

A major push in the healthcare industry is preventing the problem before it can become problem. Major medical providers have been pushing these ideas in order to lessen the load on the healthcare industry itself, which happens to already have an overladen workforce facing record amounts of burnout and fatigue. By promoting health programs that focus on healthy eating habits, proper mental health practices, and less substance abuse, providers are hoping a major impact can be made.1 More serious conditions that may not be preventable, such as cancer, can be given more time and effort in terms of research and treatment, rather than those resources going towards combating obesity.

Going Digital

Keeping patients who do not need to visit the hospital at home has become a major priority. Programs have been and continue to be developed to allow patients to connect with doctors in anyway besides face to face contact. Virtual meetings and teleconferences to discus symptoms have been implemented in communities all around the globe, with many of these programs reporting great success in their trial runs. Besides just discussions between patient and doctor, these platforms can offer easier ways of requesting prescription refill, referrals, records, and other goods and services that would typically be obtained in a physical clinic.

Electronic Medical Records

One of the best innovations in the healthcare field is that of the electronic medical record, and this improvement is only getting better every year. Transferable medical records via secure online portals has allowed for faster data transfer, leading to more positive patient outcomes and quicker treatment times. Instead of waiting for the physical record to show up at a hospital, records can be brought up in the blink of an eye if a patient is referred to a specialist or chooses to change primary care providers.3 This innovation may seem like a no brainer type situation, but the move from physical file records and fax machines is still an ongoing struggle within the medical community, with many holdouts still refusing to switch to any kind of electronic record system.

The Future is Now

All these innovations only make up a small portion of the major shift that is occurring in hospitals today. As sicknesses get worse and medicine continues to advance, it appears that the future is happening right in front of our eyes, with no sign of slowing down. The next 10 to 20 years

might hold more than the imagination can think of.

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How Has COVID-19 Changed Healthcare Industry

Unless you have been living under a rock for the past few months, you have most likely heard the term COVID-19. This new strain of flu has swept across the globe, forcing entire countries to quite literally close their doors to the outside world. Populations of hundreds of millions have been ordered to stay in their homes and wait out the storm. Everyday citizens all around the world watch as economies crash, people pass away, and leaders scramble to figure out response plans that help those in need. There is no doubt that the lives lived before this virus cannot be returned to, whether that change is large or small all depends on circumstance. Industries themselves are changing as well, with no industry changing more than that of healthcare. This should come as no shock, since healthcare providers all around the world have shouldered the weight of this pandemic, it is no surprise that they will change the most in the coming months and years.

HealthCare’s Response

Responses to these types of pandemics will no doubt change

dramatically. Whether you agree with your country's response or not, there is much to be learned from all of this. Vast amounts of data will be put under the microscope once COVID-19 has run its course, and much of this data will go on to influence entire nation's response protocols for the next potential pandemic.1 How supply chains are set up, or patient interactions occur, will all see change in the next few years. All of this will be done to minimize the risk of spreading a potential future virus, and if one were to spread, maximize the ability to combat it as quickly as possible.

Healthcare Professionals

Prior to COVID-19, professional burnout in the healthcare industry was at an all time high. Now, due to the massive stress induced by the pandemic, this statistic will only grow dramatically. With 1.2 million healthcare workers in the United States alone, considered a shortage of weeks by many experts, the fallout from the pandemic is expected to reduce that number dramatically over the course of the next one to three years.4 The perceived risk of being a healthcare worker does not help this situation either, with nurses and doctors dying from the very illness they are trying to combat. Prospective healthcare workers might now reconsider their choice and choose to pursue a career that they deem safer. This unhealthy cycle may very well continue to repeat for years to come, leading to more unneeded stress on the already encumbered global healthcare system.

What's in Store

The future of healthcare may seem uncertain right now, with quarantines being extended across the globe and people continuing to get sick. Imagining what the healthcare industry will look like one, two, or five years from now could lead anyone to a headache. However, there is no doubt that the healthcare industry will use this pandemic as a means to

improve itself inside and out and lead the world into a healthier tomorrow.

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