



Ready to go: Physician burnout drives intent to leave

By Chris Hayhurst | December 6, 2018

As more and more physicians report feeling burned out, the organizations where they work could be in for a surprise.

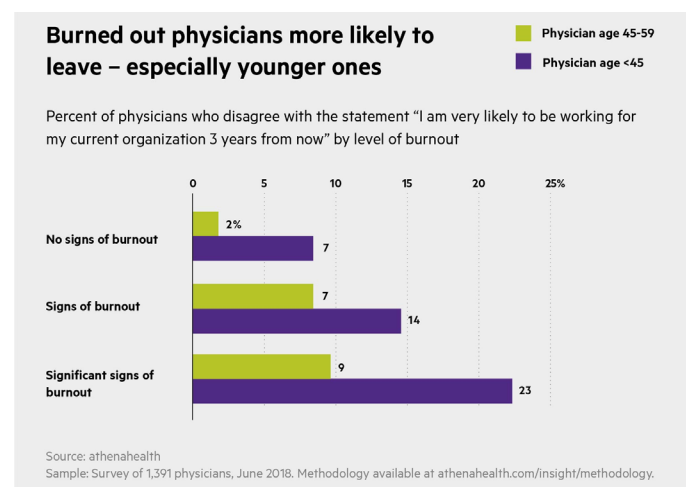
A recent survey conducted by athenahealth found that burnout is causing physicians to consider leaving their practices. Younger doctors in particular think it's unlikely they'll be with the same organization in three years.

Burnout drives intent to leave

Among physicians under the age of 45, the survey found, 23 percent of those with significant signs of burnout said they would probably leave their practice. That figure drops to 9 percent among similarly burned-out physicians ages 45 to 49.

The survey asked doctors, "How often do you feel burned out from your work?" and "How often do you feel you've become more callous toward people since you took this job?" Those who reported feeling either way at least "a

few times a week" were considered to have significant signs of burnout.



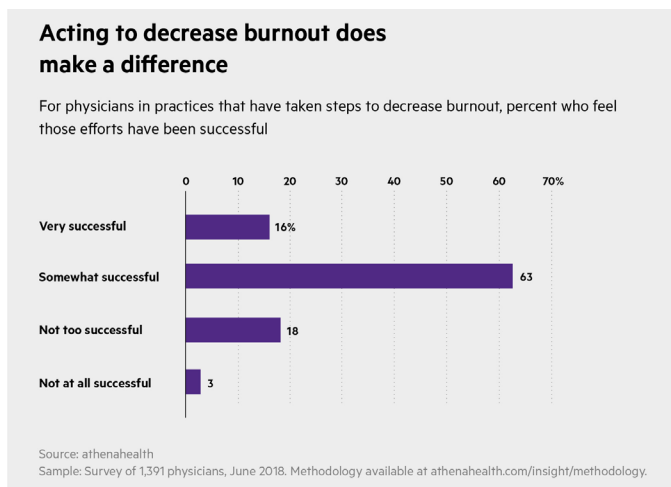
On the plus side, as levels of reported burnout decreased, so did intent to leave. Only 14 percent of those under age 45 (and 7 percent of those ages 45-49) who reported just "some signs" of burnout thought it likely they'd change employers within three years; and those proportions fell to 7 and 2 percent respectively among those with no signs of burnout at all.

Burnout is not the same for everyone

Meanwhile, the survey revealed, more female primary care physicians show signs of burnout than male PCPs; more younger PCPs show signs of burnout than older PCPs; and, among specialists, older physicians (43 percent) are more likely to be burned out than their younger counterparts (27 percent).

Other interesting conclusions from the athenahealth research: high productivity in primary care physicians often goes hand-in-hand with burnout. And more than 40 percent of those exhibiting signs of burnout said they lack the “tools,” “resources,” and “latitude” they need to provide high-quality care to their patients.

Addressing burnout works



The silver lining in the survey's findings is that healthcare organizations that are actively addressing burnout seem to be succeeding in their efforts. While less than a third of physicians surveyed reported their leadership doing anything to address the issue, 79% of those whose organizations have taken action report that the efforts are working.

So is there a business case for addressing physician burnout given its potential for driving turnover? “I think it’s absolutely important that we take this issue seriously,” says Rushika Fernandopulle, M.D., co-founder and CEO of Iora Health in Massachusetts. When a doctor leaves a practice, Fernandopulle says, it can be “hugely destructive in all kinds of ways,

from the cost of recruiting, to patient retention, to outcomes, to team morale.”

And then there’s the impact on physicians themselves. “We need to start by fixing the physician’s job – redesigning the care process from the ground up, and giving them the support they need with robust teams and technologies” that help them do their work.

Failing that, Fernandopulle adds, healthcare organizations shouldn’t be surprised when their physicians show signs of burnout. “And we shouldn’t be surprised when they decide to leave.”

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