

Job Burnout in Healthcare

Burnout is not a medical diagnosis but is a multifaceted syndrome consisting of exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced accomplishment.

It is a chronic state of being tired, cynical, and discouraged and is in many ways the opposite to feeling engaged with work. Burnout is a response to the social and work environment and is it is recognised as an occupational phenomenon by the World Health Organisation (ICD-11).

Burnout exists when all three factors are in place, although it is recognised in the literature that low sense of accomplishment is an independent factor.

Then is important to note, individuals may show elements of what characterises burnout, but researchers consider these to be different problems, as illustrated below:



High burnout:	High fatigue	High depersonalisation	Low sense of accomplishment
Disengaged:		High depersonalisation	
Overextended:	High fatigue		
Ineffective:			Low sense of accomplishment
High engagement:	Low fatigue	Low depersonalisation	High sense of accomplishment

Research conducted in 2019 by the Intensive Care Society indicated that around 1 in 3 intensive care professionals experience full burnout (Vincent et al 2019). This is common within healthcare professionals and has been thought to be on the rise since this research. The research indicated that nurses and allied health professionals are more prone to experience high emotional exhaustion, and that consultants and doctors in training are more prone to experiencing depersonalisation.

It is also important to recognise that some staff will experience RustOut rather than burnout- where they are no longer challenged or inspired by their work, and this can lead to a sense of disengagement.

Recognise job burnout in yourself

1. Do you recognise a continued state of high emotional exhaustion and fatigue?

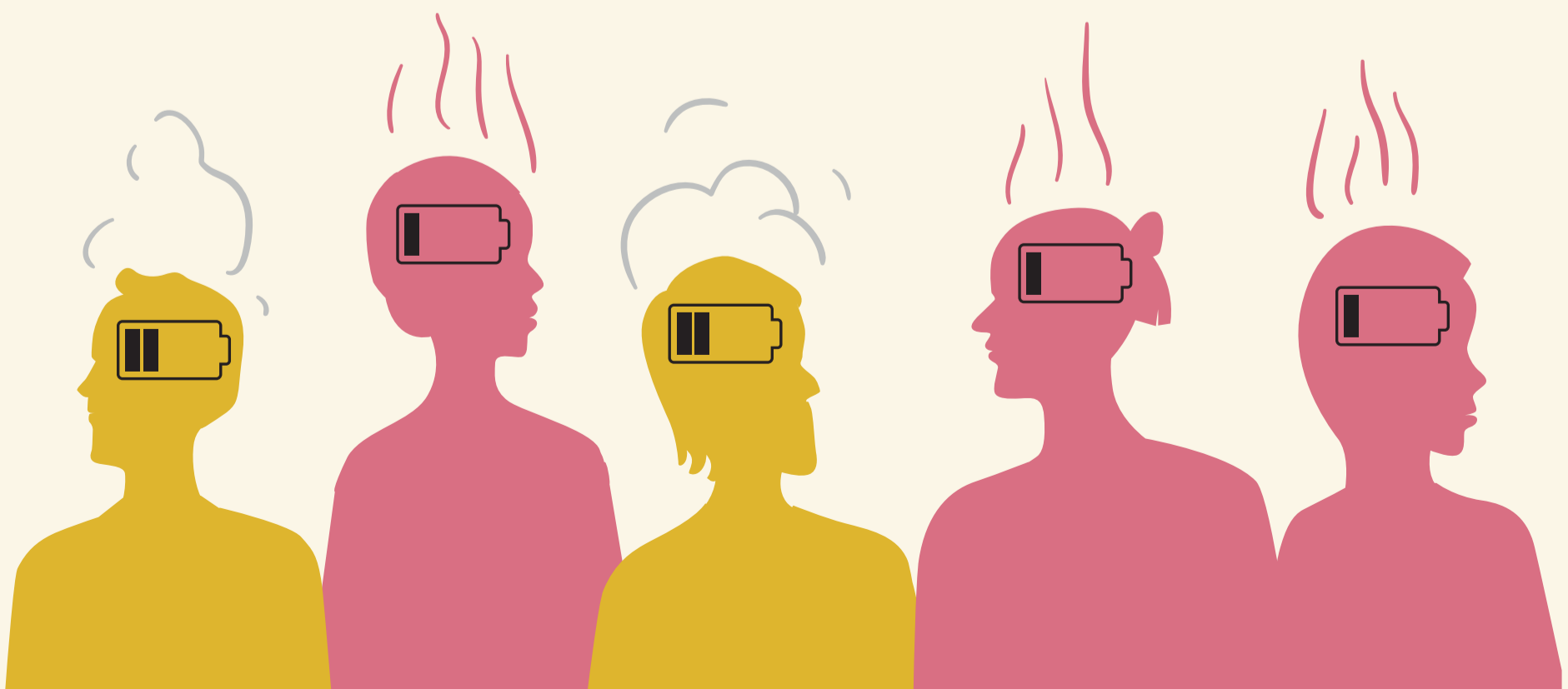
- Tiredness that lingers, and is not resolved through a break or rest
- Feeling drained throughout the working week
- Feeling you have nothing left to give to the job and wanting to work to rule

2. Do you recognise an increased sense of depersonalisation?

- You feel disconnected from your patients and less wanting to hear their stories or know about them
- You find yourself being cynical or sarcastic
- Colleagues note your incivility

3. Do you recognise reduced personal accomplishment at work?

- You feel like you are not accomplishing much
- You feel less able to deal with patients' feelings or problems
- You feel less able to enthuse about your job



Recognise Contributing Factors

Burnout is caused by multiple interacting work factors including overload and high demands, lack of autonomy and control, problems in co-worker relationships and a sense of belonging, equality and fairness.

- **Moral distress:** if you find yourself in situations where what feels the ethically correct action to take is different from what you are tasked with or able to deliver or if policies or procedures prevent you from doing what you think is right this is likely to influence your sense of accomplishment, you may try harder to compensate (leading to fatigue) or you may disconnect to cope leading to cynicism.
- **Traumatic exposure:** Healthcare staff are exposed to high levels of psychological trauma. Sometimes people disconnect to avoid thinking about this trauma, leading to cynicism
- **Lack of control.** Do you have a sense of autonomy at work? An inability to influence decisions that affect your job could lead to job burnout.
- **Lack of resources:** A lack of the resources you need to do your work may lead to you trying harder to compensate and increasing levels of fatigue. It may also impact your sense of accomplishment.
- **Unclear job expectations.** If you are unclear about the degree of authority you have or what others expect from you it can make it hard to know where to focus.
- **Dysfunctional workplace dynamics.** How are relationships at work, with your co-workers and your managers? Perhaps you feel undermined by colleagues, or a manager micromanages your work.
- **Extremes of activity.** Are demands consistently higher than resources? When a job is either monotonous or chaotic, you need constant energy to remain focused. The unpredictable clinical nature of an ICU can make it hard to regulate the extremes of activity – which can lead to fatigue and job burnout.
- **Values mis-alignment:** Do the work values and your values align? Value alignment is important for job satisfaction, meaning and belonging in work
- **Fairness and the psychological contract of work:** Are things dealt with in fair and equal ways in work? Feeling fairness of opportunity contributes to a sense of accomplishment. Feeling like you need to try harder to prove yourself risks higher levels of fatigue and cynicism.
- **Lack of social support.** If you feel isolated at work and in your personal life, you might feel more stressed as there is a lack of people to support you and help you make sense of what you experience.
- **Work-life imbalance.** If your work takes up so much of your time and effort that you don't have the energy to spend time with your family and friends, you might burn out quickly.

Act to reduce burnout

Managing Fatigue

Manage the basics such as your shift pattern, sleep, diet and exercise. Consider what is important in your role and what to focus on. Consider how much the role takes from you as well as what it gives you and re-prioritise. Discuss the what your managers expect of you and what is possible. Look at our resources around managing shift work.

Managing Depersonalisation

Find ways to re-engage with why you do what you do. In ICU being involved in follow up clinics and ICU Steps groups can remind you why we do the work we do.

Managing a sense of accomplishment

Discuss with your team leader or manager what are the expectations of you in your role. Try to set goals. Make sure you have your annual appraisal and link this to your career needs. Evaluate your options and whether this role can offer you any further sense of accomplishment.

Find ways to re-engage with what matters to you

When you feel burned out you can lose sight of what you care about in work. Take time to pay more attention to what you are doing on a day by day basis and the small moments that energise you- be it a patient interaction, or connecting with a colleague. Try to take notice of these things. Consider how you might shape your role to have more time to focus on these elements. Consider how you might change your job plan.

Seek support

ICU staff sometimes try hard to do things alone. However, our work is challenging, and there is no shame in asking for help from peers, your manager, or professional psychological support. Please look at the Thriving at Work Hub on www.ics.ac.uk/thrive for options of psychological support. Please consider: your hospital occupational health and wellbeing offer or your GP as a source of onward referral.