A MANAGER’S GUIDE
SEVEN VISIBLE SIGNS THAT YOUR NURSES MAY BE SUFFERING FROM BURNOUT & HOW TO PREVENT IT AT YOUR HOSPITAL.
NURSING BURNOUT signs include no longer finding enjoyment in areas of the job the nurse once really liked, becoming cynical or bitter about the job, and starting to experience problems in relationships with co-workers, friends or family, as a result of the conflicts of with their job. As a Nurse Manager, other signs to watch out for are nurses who frequently find excuses to not go to work, calling off or asking to go home early on a regular basis. Also be aware if your nurses are becoming easily annoyed with co-workers and envious of those who do enjoy their work, and not caring if they do a good job or not. Physical and emotional exhaustion are not uncommon in burnout. Burnout can create incredible havoc on a nurse’s personal life as well.¹

1. CALLING IN SICK TO WORK FREQUENTLY.
2. CHRONICALLY LATE GETTING TO WORK.
3. DEADLINES ARE NOT MET.
4. PROBLEMS WITH RELATIONSHIPS.
5. REGULARLY ASKING TO GO HOME EARLY.
6. SUDDEN FLUCTUATION IN WEIGHT.
7. FREQUENT COLDS OR ILLNESS.

“You don’t have that same spark that you used to have... You feel overwhelmed. I knew I had to do things for myself to continue to stay in nursing.”

– Janine Mazabob, RN from Even Keel, by Rebecca Ray
HELP YOUR NURSE BATTLE BURNOUT

If you ask your nurses what keeps them in nursing, most will say it is going home knowing that they did a good job and made a difference for their patients. It’s not about salary. Mostly it is about having control over what they do as nurses and how they do it. Lack of control is really what drives nursing satisfaction down and burnout up.

Burnout is a term nobody wants to hear, see, or experience, but it’s real. Burnout happens for a variety of reasons, but ultimately it communicates a situation where “caring for others has become a chore.” The art of nursing becomes a burden of all sorts. Nursing becomes nothing but eight or 12 hours of tasks that, when completed, will allow the nurse to go home.

Here is a list of some ways in which you as Nurse Manager can help your nurses reduce stress and take back control of their working lives:

STOP DENYING. Tell your nurses to take a minute and listen to the wisdom of their body. Have them start to admit the stresses and pressures which have manifested physically, mentally, or emotionally.

AVOIDING ISOLATION. Don’t do everything alone! Encourage them to develop or renew intimacies with friends and loved ones. Closeness not only brings new insights, but also is anathema to agitation and depression.

CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES. If their job, relationship, a situation, or a person is dragging them under, have the nurse try to alter their circumstance, or if necessary, leave it entirely.

DIMINISH INTENSITY. Have the nurse pinpoint those areas or aspects which summon up the most concentrated intensity and work toward alleviating that pressure.

STOP OVER NURTURING. If a nurse routinely takes on other people’s problems and responsibilities, teach them to gracefully disengage. Have them try to get some nurturing for themselves.

LEARN TO SAY “NO”. Nurses can diminish intensity by speaking up for themselves. This means refusing additional requests or demands on their time or emotions.

BEGIN TO BACK OFF AND DETACH. Instruct the nurse to delegate, not only at work, but also at home and with friends. In this case, detachment means rescuing themselves for themselves.

REASSESS THEIR VALUES. Help them sort out the meaningful values from the temporary and fleeting, the essential from the nonessential. They’ll conserve energy and time, and begin to feel more centered.

LEARN TO PACE. Try to take life in moderation. You only have so much energy available. Ascertain what is wanted and needed in their life, then they can begin to balance work with love, pleasure and relaxation.

TAKE CARE OF BODY. Nurses should not skip meals, abuse themselves with rigid diets, disregard their need for sleep, or break the doctor appointments. It is important they take care of themselves nutritionally.

DIMINISH WORRY AND ANXIETY. Try to keep superstitious worrying to a minimum - it changes nothing. They’ll have a better grip on the situation if they spend less time worrying and more time taking care of their real needs.

KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR. Suggest to your nurses to begin bringing job and happy moments into their lives. Very few people suffer burnout when they’re having fun.
Lack of recognition is the #1 reason employees leave a job. It has been proven that a 2 minute positive and specific detailed recognition of an employee’s performance once a month will dramatically increase a person’s job satisfaction. Create a monthly newsletter with updates, celebrations and kudos from the month past.

Giving your staff simple tokens of appreciation once a month for a job or task well done has the ability to relieve stress by 25%. For example, tickets to a movie, Subway gift card, car wash token, massage.

Celebrate individual birthdays / anniversaries / education / graduation.

Take a group or person to lunch once a quarter and ask them for their ideas.

Build group cohesiveness through encouraged peer support, regular training, discussions and in-services. Ask staff to suggest topics.

Vary professional responsibilities.

Let staff know it is all right to ask for a “stress break.”

Watch for signs of significant stress in staff, and offer them help. Often times, simply stating the obvious provides a sense of support and validation. (See page 2- Seven Visible Signs)

Make asking for and accepting help part of the hospital’s culture. Providers who admit to feeling stressed must be accepted and not viewed as weak. It takes time to build the attitudes required for this level of openness.
Do you remember why you became a nurse?

What causes burnout in the first place? Burnout on the job can be a direct result of inadequate staffing, according to E. Carol Polifroni, RN, EdD, CNAA, associate professor of nursing, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, and a recognized expert on workforce issues. If hospital administrations don’t work with employees to ensure adequate staffing ratios, nurses need to speak with their feet, says Polifroni. “I’m not suggesting job-hopping. But a nurse does not have to stay in a job because it’s the only game in town,” she adds. ⁵

Besides poor staffing, the lack of autonomy in making decisions on care can also contribute to burnout. When a nurse has to call in a resident or intern to the bedside to make a decision that the nurse is capable of making, the nurse’s knowledge and skills are ignored and diminished. ⁶ Hospital nurse work environments that devolve greater autonomy and control to nurses at the bedside, provide administrative support for nursing care, have adequate staff, and facilitate good relationships between nurses and physicians are associated with lower risk-adjusted Medicare mortality; higher patient satisfaction; lower nurse burnout; and lower rates of needlestick injuries to nurses. ¹⁰⁻¹³

In addition to poor staffing and autonomy, lack of recognition of the professional nurse also contributes to burnout. Burnout can be avoided by rewarding the current staff with bonuses and incentives for the great work they do instead using that money to attract new staff. Again, the lack of recognition is the number one reason people leave their jobs.

Before you start losing your permanent staff to burnout, try supplementing your current team with temporary healthcare staff (i.e. Traveling Nurse or Contract, Per Diem). The difference between the types of temporary staffing is based on the duration of the assignment; Per Diem is typically short in length while a traveling assignment can last up to an average of 13 weeks. Temp staff can come as a big relief to the current members of your team. Travelers are able to jump right in and fill the necessary hours needed to keep nurse to patient ratios at their optimum and keep your current staff refreshed.

In closing, nurse burnout can be costly to hospitals. The average visible and invisible costs associated with nurse turnover is approximately $50,000 or more. Instead of spending more money on overtime hours, it would be better spent on reducing nurse-patient ratios. This would have the desired effects of improving patient outcomes and reducing nurse work pressure. ¹⁴

Nursing may not be for everyone. It takes dedication and a tenacious attitude. There are stressful aspects of being a nurse, but the good news is that the same experiences that cause stress can also give the nurse a greater sense of gratification. Nursing is a highly emotional and sometimes strenuous job, and a nurse can learn to focus that energy into positivity. ⁶

Everyone is prone to some sort of emotional disengagement - feeling stressed and unable to cope with their job. With knowledge about recognizing the problem, causes, symptoms and ways to change your environment to reduce stressful situations, nursing burnout within your staff can be avoided. Your staff looks to you as a leader and it is your obligation to provide them with a positive working environment. By implementing some of the tactics into your unit, you’ll soon have the nurses working for you, not against.
REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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2. In the mix: Avoid Burnout by Caring for Yourself

3. 15 Usefull Techniques for Nursing Stress Burnout
   http://www.stressreductionbasics.com/techniquesfornursingstressburnout.html

4. Keeping Nurses On the Job: Retention is Part of the Answer to the Nursing Shortage

5. Fired Up or Burnt Out

6. How Nurses Are Avoiding Burnout
   http://www.nursinglink.com/careers/articles/3716


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