



# Healthcare Workers and Burnout Finding Solutions



**Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers (HCWs) were already experiencing high levels of burnout. However, the pandemic overloaded an already struggling system and workforce. Although burnout manifests in individuals, it is fundamentally an organizational failing. Researchers have identified six occupational risk factors associated with burnout which include: workload, reward, control, fairness, community/culture, and values.**

**Systemic changes need to be made by innovative leaders and tenacious managers to target these specific areas.**

# Workload



THE AMOUNT OF WORK AN INDIVIDUAL IS ASSIGNED.

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**The Problem:** "Excessive workload is always the aggravating factor for burnout. When demands constantly push physiologies beyond their capacity, energy sources are overloaded. Nobody wins when we do more than we can do well." -Robinson

1. Create an environment that supports a work-life balance.
2. Assign employees according to their areas of experience and competence.
3. Ensure fair and appropriate scheduling.
  - a. Provide adequate break times between and during shifts.
  - b. Employees should only be working manageable hours.
  - c. Allow sufficient time for sleep. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests 7+ hours of sleep a night.
4. Simplify paperwork and administrative duties.
  - a. Reduce administrative burdens that stand between HCWs and their patients.
5. Identify ways to increase efficiency.
  - a. Health systems should regularly review internal processes to reduce duplicate, inefficient work tasks.
  - b. Streamline paperwork and screening processes.
  - c. Find ways to improve and simplify electronic medical records that optimize usability, workflow, and communication across systems.
6. Establish team-based care in the workplace.
  - a. Expand the roles of medical assistants.
7. Initiate an early intervention or support program to assist new and young HCWs with managing stress and emotions.

# Reward



THE EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC COMPENSATION OR REWARDS RECEIVED FOR A JOB.

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**The Problem: "Extreme workload wears away at the energy and loyalty of employees. When overload becomes the expectation and there is no compensating reward for the extra effort or even a sense of gratitude, it is human nature to feel you're on the short end of the stick." -Robinson**

1. Ensure HCWs receive a living wage, access to health insurance, and adequate sick leave.
2. Increase ease of access to mental health supports.
  - a. Utilize virtual technology to create additional mental health support for employees.
  - b. Hire mental health workers to exclusively support employees.
3. Adopt an approach that does not punish HCWs for reporting mental health concerns or seeking help.
4. Appreciate and recognize efforts.



# Control



THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS RELATED TO YOUR WORK AND HAVE AUTONOMY OVER YOUR JOB.

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**The Problem: "Stress is a function of how much perceived control we feel we have over the demands coming our way." -Robinson**

1. Include HCWs when designing and implementing large- and small-scale well-being strategies.
2. Provide HCWs with greater control over their work environment.
  - a. Increase scheduling flexibility.
  - b. Offer choice in the patient assignment.
3. HCWs' decisions should be supported by managers and leaders.
4. Encourage employees to create boundaries at work.



# Fairness



RECEIVING FAIR AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT.

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The Problem: "There is an implied contract for most of us that we will be treated in good faith. When that trust is broken, cynicism grows. In the era of downsizing and restructuring, many feel their efforts are not valued, promises are not being kept, and everyone is replaceable. This climate added to chronic overload can ramp up the withdrawal and cynicism of burnout." -Robinson

1. Provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and prioritize worker well-being.
2. Ensure that everyone receives fair and equitable treatment.
3. Recognize and address systemic biases.
4. Find ways to ensure employees have access to mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health services.
5. To ensure systemic challenges are targeted and addressed, provincial and federal governments must prioritize healthcare funding and incorporate feedback from all levels, including HCWs, researchers, and stakeholders.



# Community/Culture



THE PERVASIVE BEHAVIORS AND PRACTICES THAT OCCUR IN A WORKING ENVIRONMENT.

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The Problem: "High-turnover, mergers, and constant changes within organizations can hollow out support systems and leave employees estranged as they try to do more than they are equipped for. Alienation is the route to cynicism, a main dimension of burnout. People feel more depersonalized when there is a sense that no one cares, and engagement disappears. The risk for burnout grows as trust fades." -Robinson

1. Ensure there are sufficient resources for all staff, as competing for resources has the potential to intensify workplace conflict.
2. Protect staff from violence. 8 in 10 healthcare workers report experiencing physical or verbal abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Build a culture that supports healthy well-being.
  - a. Break the tradition of silence surrounding the suffering of HCWs.
  - b. Make HCWs aware of resources that will support their mental health.
  - c. Eliminate the shame and stigma associated with seeking help for mental health struggles.
  - d. As a leader, ensure your team knows you value their mental health, as external recognition of the challenging circumstances and encouragement to access resources can be instrumental in HCWs seeking help.
  - e. Phase out expectations to work overtime and to work while sick.
4. Find additional ways to build a culture of inclusion, equity, and respect that will improve workforce morale.

# Values



A PERSON'S DEEPLY HELD BELIEFS, VALUES, AND PRINCIPLES.

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**The Problem:** "People are more likely to embrace the vision of the company they work for when it reflects their values. But when those values are contradicted by policies or behaviors that are at odds with deeply held values, the mismatch can lead to an acceleration of disengagement and withdrawal." -Robinson

1. Ensure that the values of the work environment and organization are clearly articulated and that all employees share a collective understanding.
2. The organization's values must direct decision-making processes made by leadership and management.
3. Healthcare in Canada needs investment. Having appropriate resources and staffing helps create a work environment that HCWs are proud of.



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