

Eli's Rehab Report

Lifestyle: Stress Management: Are You Burning Out?

Ask yourself these 7 questions to see if your flame is flickering.

You may think you've got a handle on professional burnout, but the signs are not always obvious. Our checklist below will help you diagnose possible burn out in yourself or any colleagues who may be losing the capacity to really care for patients:

- Have you over-responded to something at work or have others been shocked by your reaction to what seemed to them like a relatively small thing? When people "bag" or "swallow" painful events as a form of emotional survival, the emotional buildup can lead to a small thing triggering a big reaction.
- Are your personal and health habits poor due to stress or attempts to cope? Danger signs include drinking after work to calm down, or eating (and weight gain) to soothe your nerves, poor diet, neglecting exercise, and overspending.
- Do you use language to refer to patients in a way that distances you from them as individuals? All healthcare professionals or most do this to some extent ("the diabetic, or tube feeder, or three person lift in room 3"), but people who are burning out may find themselves using such language more often.
- Are you becoming generally negative? Have people begun to describe you that way? You might catch yourself, for example, always looking at the glass as half empty rather than half full.
- Do you feel disengaged from others or has the quality of your relationships with others gone downhill? Signs of relationship distress can include more conflict than usual with others or a lack of emotional connection with people.
- Do you feel numb or untouched in situations that tend to draw some emotional reaction from others? People in helping professions who are truly burned out may even pride themselves on their acquired "toughness."
- Do you find yourself trying to "fake" interest in what you're doing and/or fake concern or empathy for patients? If so, has anyone in the office noticed or commented on this? Sometimes people who are burned out can fake concern or interest if the office has taken on the same burned out quality, which may occur due to performance pressures. But if someone with 'compassion fatigue' works in a real caring environment, he or she will stand out like a sore thumb.

What Can I Do About Burnout?

If you are suffering from burnout related to job stress, it can lead to under-involvement with patients, and that can alienate them. If you recognize some danger signs of burnout, talk to a professional or mentor in your field someone you trust to really listen and acknowledge what you are feeling without judging you.

Additionally, try these positivity tips:

The Optimist Creed Promise Yourself ...

- To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.
- To talk health, happiness, and prosperity to every person you meet.
- To make all your friends feel that there is something worthwhile in them.
- To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true.
- To think only of the best, to work only for the best, and to expect only the best.
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own.
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future.
- To wear a cheerful expression at all times and give a smile to every living creature you meet.

- To give so much time to improving yourself that you have no time to criticize others.
- To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble.
- To think well of yourself and to proclaim this fact to the world, not in loud word, but in great deeds.
- To live in the faith that the whole world is on your side, so long as you are true to the best that is in you.