



# **The doctor's mental health: Is the doctor whole?**

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# The doctor's mental health: Is the doctor whole?

## Content

- Healthcare workers' stressors
- Do doctors acknowledge stress?
- Global review of doctors' mental health
- The South African situation
- Suggested remedies
- Conclusion



# Introduction

- ▶ Doctors, like all workforce in any given sector, are not super-humans
- ▶ The ever-increasing patient workload and administrative requirements have a bearing on doctors' mental health
- ▶ Health care practitioners exhibit symptoms and sign of severe burn-out leading to depression, suicidal ideation and suicide.
- ▶ It becomes crucial for them to self-realise and seek help timeously.

## Exhausting, long working hours



# Patient overload



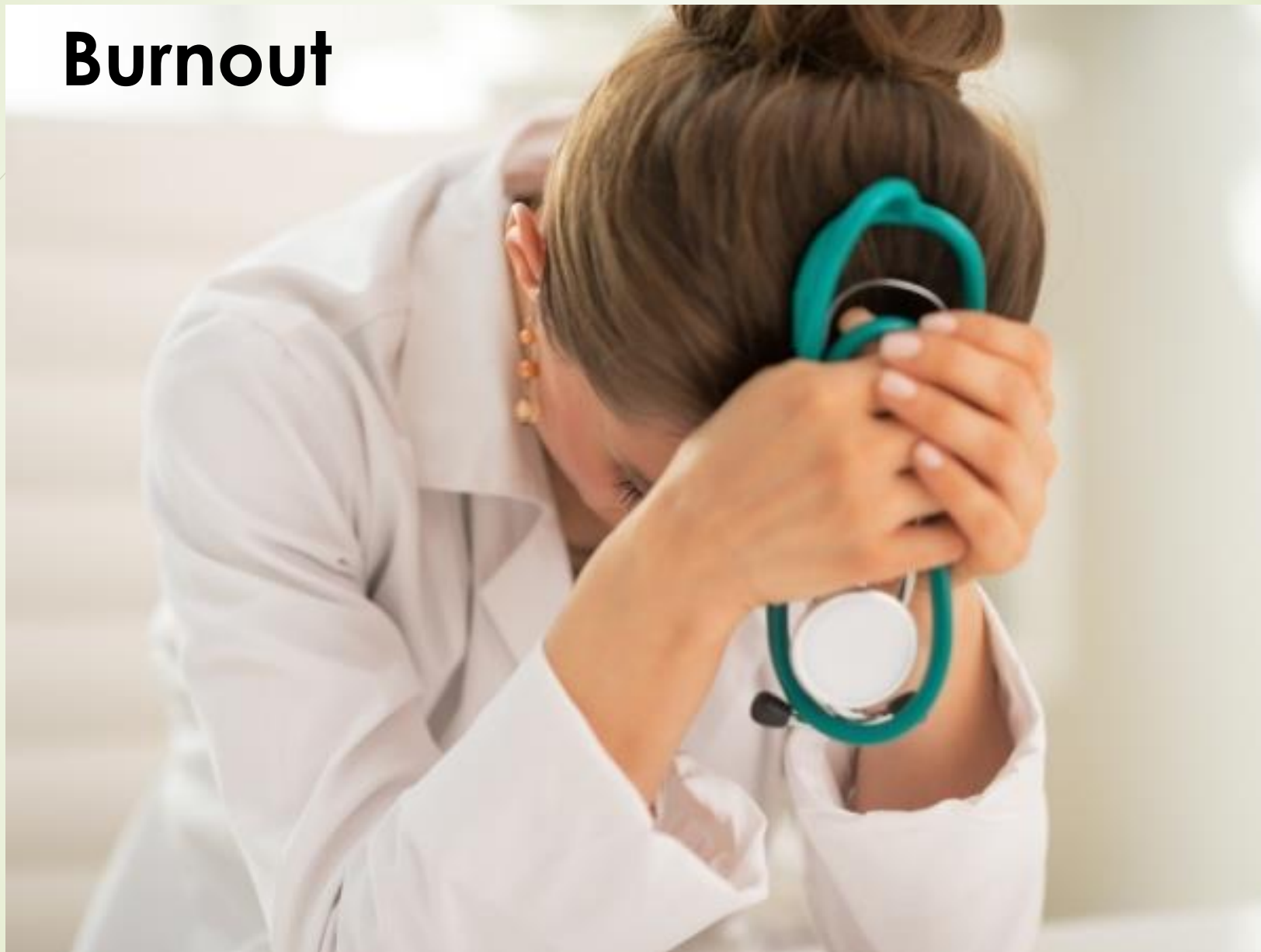
# Bad filing system



# Stressed by administrative work



# Burnout







**➔ It all starts from student days!**



# Burnout & Suicidal Ideation

ACADEMIA AND CLINIC

Annals of Internal Medicine

## Burnout and Suicidal Ideation among U.S. Medical Students

Liselotte N. Dyrbye, MD; Matthew R. Thomas, MD; F. Stanford Massie, MD; David V Power, MD; Anne Eacker, MD; William Harper, MD; Steven Durning, MD; Christine Moutier, MD; Daniel W. Szydlo, BA; Paul J. Novotny, MS; Jeff A. Sloan, PhD; and Tait D. Shanafelt, MD

**Participants:** 4287 medical students at 7 medical schools, with students at 5 institutions studied longitudinally.

**Results:** Burnout was reported by 49.6% (95% CI, 47.5% to 51.8%) of students, and 11.2% (CI, 9.9% to 12.6%) reported suicidal ideation within the past year.

*Ann Intern Med.* 2008;149:334-341.

# RESEARCH

## Suicidal ideation and attempt among South African medical students

L van Niekerk, L Scribante, P J Raubenheimer

International data reveal that medical students are at higher risk of attempting suicide than the general population. We aimed to determine the prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempt among South African medical students from three universities and identify key predisposing risk factors. Data were collected via a questionnaire to medical students on demographics, mental health history, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation and attempt. A total of 874 medical students from three universities were enrolled. We

found a high prevalence of suicidal ideation (32.3%) and suicidal attempt (6.9%), which is three times higher than the general age-appropriate South African population. Simple screening questionnaires can identify such students, enabling universities to provide targeted and improved support for at-risk students.

*S Afr Med J* 2012;102(6):372-373.

**Table 1. Characteristics of students never attempting suicide v. students attempting suicide**

	Not attempted suicide		Attempted suicide		<i>p</i> -value*
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
<b>Demographics</b>					
Gender					0.804
Male	299	36.9	19	35.2	
Female	512	63.1	35	64.8	
Age					0.076
<25	763	94.1	47	87.0	
>25	49	5.9	7	13.0	
Relationship					0.880
Single	463	57.1	30	55.6	
In relationship	340	42.9	23	44.4	
Year of study					0.382
Pre-clinical	656	80.9	41	75.9	
Clinical	156	19.1	13	24.1	
<b>Prior psychiatric history</b>					
Diagnosed depression	75	9.2	27	50	<0.001
Diagnosed other psychiatric condition	28	3.5	13	24	<0.001
Use of mood-enhancing medication	114	14	24	44	<0.001
<b>Symptoms of burnout/depression</b>					
More tired than usual	754	93	49	91	0.429
Less satisfaction from life than usual	68	8	13	24	<0.001
Never feel positive about the future	10	1.2	11	20	<0.001
<b>Suicidal ideation</b>					
Life not worth living	279	34.4	48	91	<0.001
Thought about taking own life	234	28.9	45	84.9	<0.001

\*For comparison between those who attempted suicide and those who did not.

January 2011 January 17, 2011

## Special Report

# Suicidal Ideation Among American Surgeons

Tait D. Shanafelt, MD; Charles M. Balch, MD; Lotte Dyrbye, MD; [et al](#)

» [Author Affiliations](#) | [Article Information](#)

*Arch Surg.* 2011;146(1):54-62. doi:10.1001/archsurg.2010.292

**Results** Of 7905 participating surgeons (response rate, 31.7%), 501 (6.3%) reported SI during the previous 12 months. Among individuals 45 years and older, SI was 1.5 to 3.0 times more common among surgeons than the general population ( $P < .02$ ). Only 130 surgeons (26.0%) with recent SI had sought psychiatric or psychologic help, while 301 (60.1%) were reluctant to seek help due to concern that it could affect their medical license.

**Clearly, these specialists prioritised their profession above their mental health.**



**➔ Do doctors acknowledge that they are overworked?**





**MD**

**I WENT INTO  
MEDICINE  
TO WORK  
WITH PEOPLE  
AND NOT  
TO BE A  
DATA ENTRY  
CLERK**

Shawn Jones, MD, FACS



**locumstory.com**

**Physician workload and communication survey shows physicians are overworked and want more time with patients**

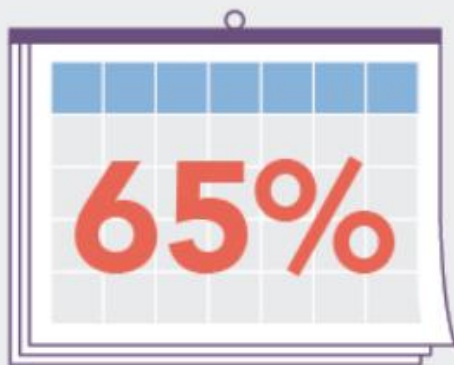




## Methodology

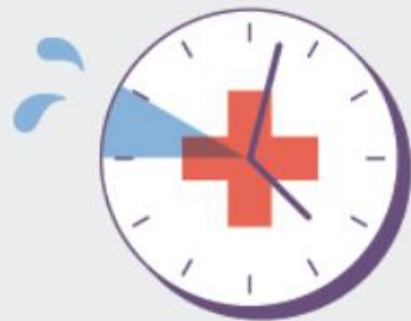
An email survey polled 993 doctors across the United States to determine physician attitudes about their workload, and how their workload affects their overall well-being and their opinion of the medical profession. The survey was conducted in December 2015 by Hanover Research on behalf of [locumstory.com](http://locumstory.com).

## Physicians are feeling overworked



feel more overworked  
now than when they  
started their careers

**The paperwork monster.**  
A significant amount of  
their time is spent on  
paperwork and digital  
documentation.



**22%**  
spend more than an hour  
a day doing paperwork

Physicians' free time is declining

64%

say they have less  
free time now than  
when they began  
their careers

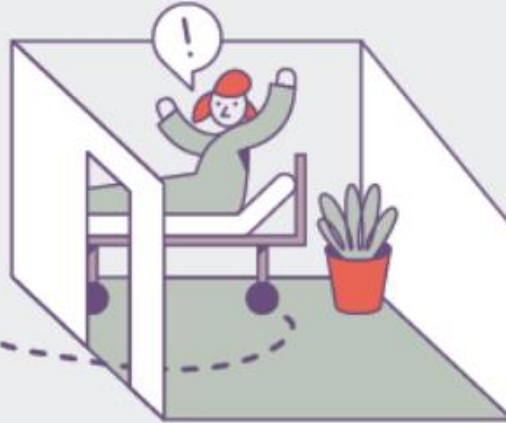


PRACTICING MEDICINE SHOULD FEEL  
LIKE A CALLING. NOT A SENTENCE.

Physicians don't have enough time with patients

**58%**

spend less time with patients now than when they started their careers



**59%**

want more time to communicate with patients



**MEDICINE IS BEST PRACTICED FACE-TO-FACE.  
NOT WHILE ON THE RUN.**

**Therefore,**

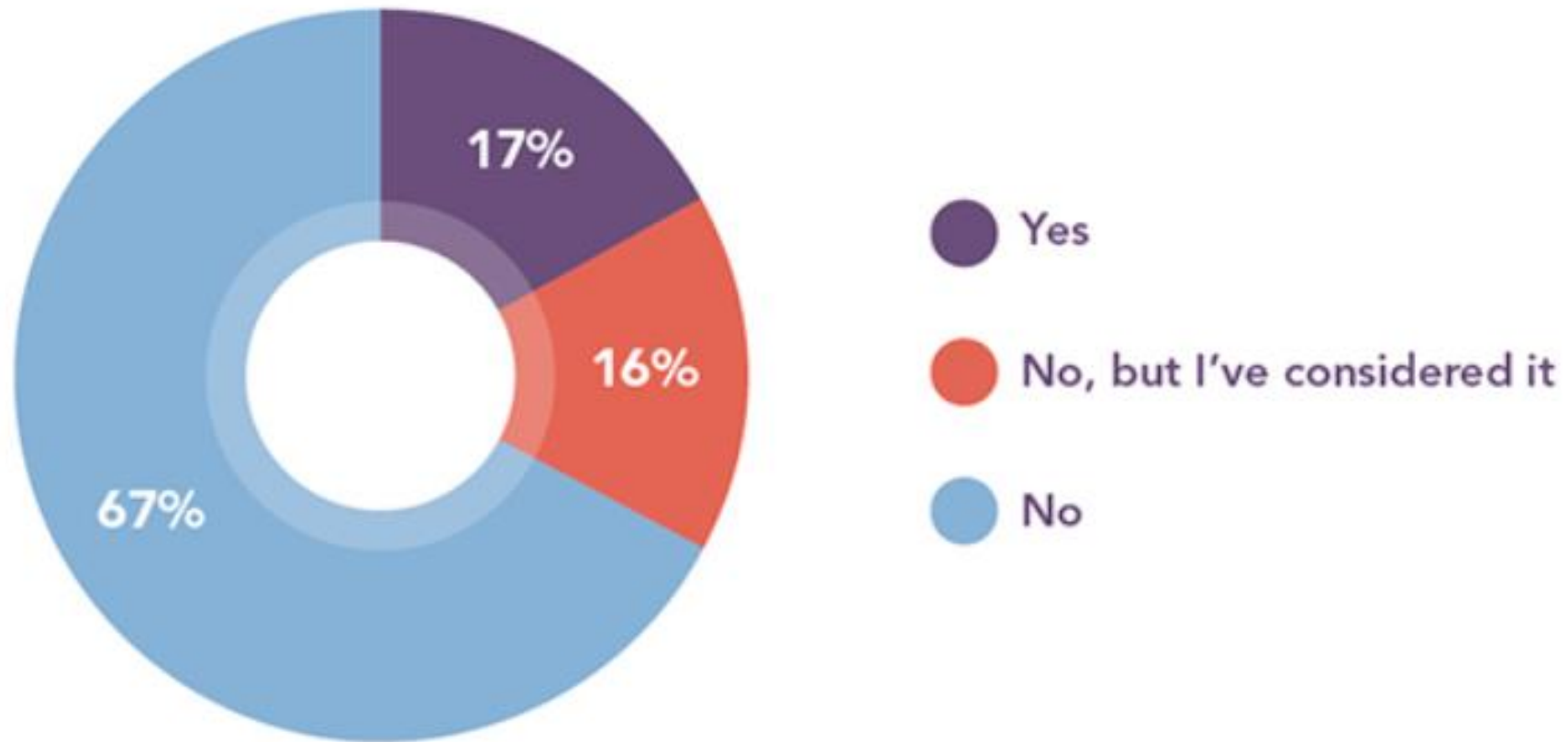
**Physicians feel overworked**

**Have poor work/life balance**

**Free time is declining**

**More Physicians are Considering Leaving Medicine**

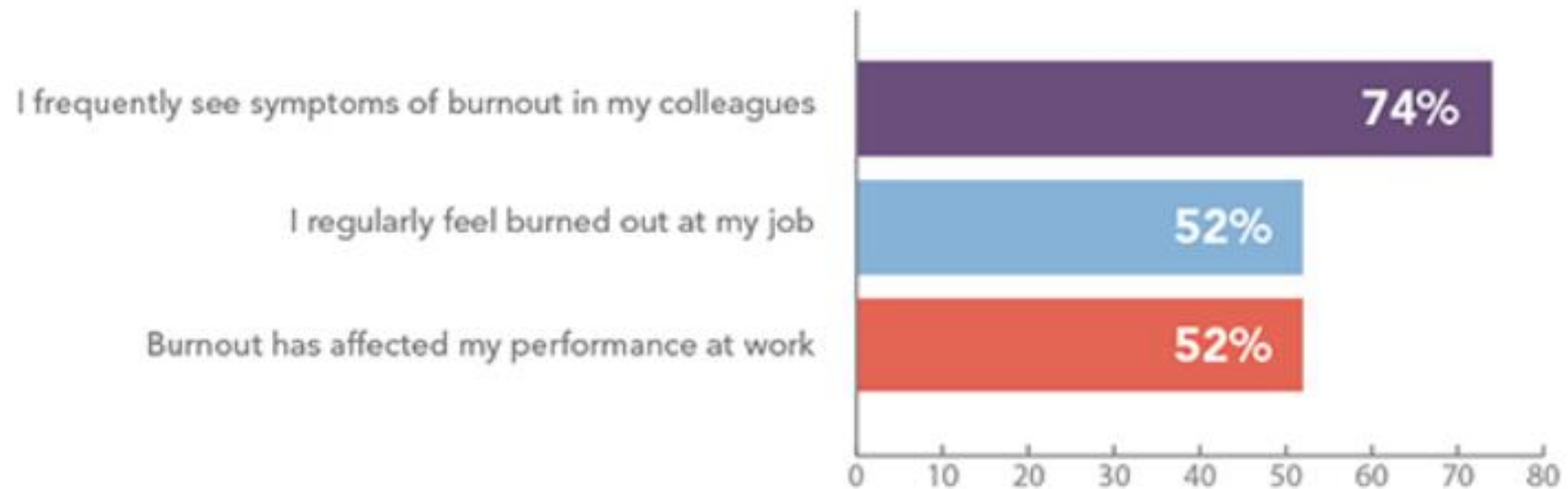
## Have you ever met with a mental health professional?



More than 3,700 physicians in nearly every specialty, work setting and region of the USA were surveyed

Physician workload survey 2018

## Do you see burnout in yourself or others?



**I'm sorry, I can't face being a doctor any more...**





# A young female doctor's account of near-suicide

- ▶ “On my morning drives to the hospital, the tears fell like rain. The prospect of the next 14 hours – 8am to 10pm with not a second’s respite from the nurses’ beeps, or the overwhelming needs of too many sick patients – was almost too much to bear.”
- ▶ “By the time I neared the end of my first year as a doctor, I’d chosen the spot where I intended to kill myself. I’d bought everything I needed to do it. All my youthful enthusiasm for healing, big dreams of saving lives and of making a difference, had soured and I felt an astronomic emptiness.”
- ▶ “As I wrestled silently with the urge to kill myself, another house officer in my trust went right on and did it.”
- ▶ It wasn’t just exhaustion that drove me into depression. Plenty of jobs are busy. But there is something uniquely traumatic about being responsible for patients’ lives,...





# A young female doctor's account of near-suicide

- ▶ I remember running from the bed of one patient, ... to another .... Two stricken patients, but only one doctor, wracked with the knowledge that if something went wrong, **the guilt would be hers alone.**
- ▶ **I was lucky. I was pushed by the colleague in whom I finally confided into seeking professional help. It took antidepressants, therapy and a narrowly-avoided psychiatric inpatient admission to bring me back to the land of the living.**

# The harsh reality

- ▶ Doctor suicide is the medical profession's grubby little secret.
- ▶ Female doctors are twice as likely as the general population to take our own lives.
- ▶ A US study shows our suicide rate appears higher than that of other professional groups,
- ▶ with young doctors at the beginning of their training being particularly vulnerable.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access



# Mental disorders among workers in the healthcare industry: 2014 national health insurance data

Min-Seok Kim<sup>1</sup>, Taeshik Kim<sup>1</sup>, Dongwook Lee<sup>1</sup>, Ji-hoo Yook<sup>1</sup>, Yun-Chul Hong<sup>1</sup>, Seung-Yup Lee<sup>2</sup>, Jin-Ha Yoon<sup>3</sup> and Mo-Yeol Kang<sup>4\*</sup>

**Table 1** Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among National Health Insurance service insured employees in Korea (2014)

Prevalence cases	All insured employees						Workers in healthcare industry					
	Both (n = 13,869,767)	%	Male (n = 8,535,138)	%	Female (n = 5,334,629)	%	Both (n = 752,181)	%	Male (n = 196,957)	%	Female (n = 555,224)	%
Mood disorders <sup>a</sup>	217,752	1.57	111,269	1.30	106,483	2.00	13,709	1.82	3089	1.57	10,620	1.91
Anxiety disorders <sup>b</sup>	250,895	1.81	130,570	1.50	120,325	2.26	15,570	2.07	3528	1.79	12,042	2.17
Sleep disorders <sup>c</sup>	228,119	1.64	116,208	1.36	111,911	2.10	24,965	3.32	6861	3.48	18,104	3.26
Any psychiatric disorders <sup>d</sup>	728,767	5.25	380,223	4.45	348,544	6.53	55,139	7.33	13,512	6.86	41,627	7.50

<sup>a</sup>Mood disorders include diagnosis code of F30~F39 by Korean Standard Classification of Diseases

<sup>b</sup>Anxiety disorders include diagnosis code of F41 and F41.0~F41.9

<sup>c</sup>Sleep disorders include diagnosis code of F51, F51.0~F51.2, F51.8, F51.9, G47, G47.0, G47.1, G47.2, G47.8, and G47.9

<sup>d</sup>Any psychiatric disorders include diagnosis code of any of F00~F99 and sleep disorders



# The South African Situation

- “Faced with South Africa’s **chronic shortage of doctors and specialists**, the country’s stressed and overloaded medical professionals are at greater risk of **burnout** that puts both themselves and their patients in danger.”
- “Doctors are **2.5 times more likely to commit suicide than the general population**, while physician burnout is a leading cause of medical error”

Jansen van Rensburg  
IOL News, March 2019



# Stress among medical doctors working in public hospitals of the Ngaka Modiri Molema district (Mafikeng health region), North West province, South Africa

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*Department of Family Medicine and Primary Health Care, Faculty of Health Science, University of Limpopo (Medunsa Campus), Pretoria*



*Results.* Of the 67 doctors in the study, 34 (51%) were found to be stressed; 18 (27%) of the participants were highly stressed (morbidly stressed).

**Table 4. Distribution of participants according to number of patients seen per day and overall GHQ-12 score**

<b>No. of patients seen</b>		<b>Overall GHQ-12 score</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>≤15</b>	<b>&gt;15</b>	
No response	<i>n</i>	4	3	7
	%	6	45	11
12 - 22	<i>n</i>	10	6	16
	%	15	9	24
23 - 33	<i>n</i>	5	10	15
	%	7	15	22
34 - 44	<i>n</i>	7	7	14
	%	10	10	21
>44	<i>n</i>	7	8	15
	%	11	12	22
Total	<i>n</i>	33	34	67
	%	49	51	100.0

# Stress vs Burnout

Stress	Burnout
Characterized by over-engagement	Characterized by disengagement
Emotions are overreactive	Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideals, and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional
	May make life seem not worth living

**Stress**, by and large, involves **too much**:

too many pressures that demand too much of you physically and mentally. However, if they can just get everything under control, they'll feel better (hope).

**Burnout**, is about **not enough**. Feeling empty and mentally exhausted, devoid of motivation. The individual does not see any hope of positive change in their situation.





# Simple ways to combat burnout

## Take steps to improve your state of mind:

- ▶ **Try to find some value in your work.**

Focus on aspects of the job that you do enjoy, even if it's just chatting with your coworkers at lunch.

- ▶ **Find balance in your life.**

Focus on the parts of your life that bring you joy (outside your work situation).

- ▶ **Make friends at work.**

Having friends to chat and joke with during the day can help relieve stress


- ▶ **Take time off.**

Go on vacation, ask for a temporary leave-of-absence, anything to remove yourself from the situation.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)



# Conclusion

- Take care of **yourself** (If you **do not**, no one will)
  - You are **replaceable** overnight!
  - Be considerate of **your family** (you matter to them)
  - **Enjoy every moment** of your calling as a much needed health care professional.
- 



**Thanks,  
we may interact**



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# Why do doctors fear to disclose their mental health?

- ▶ Medicine is grappling with rising levels of **physician burnout**, one of the factors driving high rates of **depression and suicide** in the profession.
- ▶ But physicians who suffer from **mood disorders** are often reluctant to seek treatment — in part because it might jeopardize their license to practice.
- ▶ 1 of 16 surgeons reported suicidal ideation in the previous year, **BUT** few sought psychiatric or psychologic help.
- ▶ Recent suicidal ideation among surgeons was strongly related to symptoms of **depression** and a surgeon's **degree of burnout**.

Samuel L, 2017

## Do you see burnout in yourself or others?

