

Job Burnout in Intensive Care

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 it is an occupational phenomenon (ICD-11).

It 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

Recognise job burnout in yourself

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

- Feeling drained throughout the working week
- You feel you have nothing left to give
- You feel not refreshed by rest

2. Do you recognise reduced personal accomplishment at work?

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

3. Do you recognise an increased sense of depersonalisation?

- You feel disconnected from your patients
- You find yourself being cynical or sarcastic
- You find yourself being unkind to colleagues

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:** ICU staff are exposed to high levels of psychological trauma. Sometimes people disconnect to manage 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 expectation:** 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 ICU 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 are 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.

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 Wellbeing Hub on www.ics.ac.uk for options of psychological support.