

# Survey finds symptoms of burnout common among US physicians

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A national survey of 7,288 physicians (26.7 percent participation rate) finds that 45.8 percent of physicians reported at least one symptom of burnout, according to a report published Online First by *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

Other studies have suggested burnout may influence the quality of care and increase the risk for [medical errors](#), as well as have adverse effects on [physicians](#), including broken relationships, problem drinking and suicidal thoughts, according to the study background.

Tait D. Shanafelt, M.D., of the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn., and colleagues conducted a national study of burnout in physicians from all specialty disciplines using the American Medical Association Physician Masterfile and a sample of working U.S. adults from the general population for comparison.

The study's results indicate that 37.9 percent of U.S. physicians had high [emotional exhaustion](#), 29.4 percent had high depersonalization and 12.4 percent had a low sense of personal accomplishment. Compared with 3,442 working U.S. adults, physicians were more likely to have symptoms of burnout (37.9 percent vs. 27.8 percent) and to be dissatisfied with their work-life balance (40.2 percent vs. 23.2 percent), the study found.

Differences in burnout also varied by specialty with emergency medicine, general internal medicine, neurology and family medicine

having the highest rates, while pathology, dermatology, general pediatrics and [preventive medicine](#) had the lowest rates, according to the study.

"Collectively, the findings of this national study indicate that (1) the prevalence of burnout among U.S. physicians is at an alarming level, (2) physicians in specialties at the front line of care access ([emergency medicine](#), general internal medicine and [family medicine](#)) are at greatest risk, (3) physicians work longer hours and have greater struggles with work-life integration than other U.S. workers and (4) after adjusting for hours worked per week, higher levels of education and professional degrees seem to reduce the risk for burnout in fields outside of medicine, whereas a degree in medicine (M.D., or D.O.) increases the risk," the authors conclude.

Researchers suggest more work needs to be done to understand physician burnout and develop interventions.

"The fact that almost 1 in 2 U.S. physicians has symptoms of burnout implies that the origins of this problem are rooted in the environment and care delivery system rather than in the personal characteristics of a few susceptible individuals," the authors conclude. "Policy makers and health care organizations must address the problem of physician burnout for the sake of physicians and their patients."

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