Early Career Burnout in Physician Assistants: A National Survey

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Introduction

- **Burnout Syndrome:** Prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job.
  - Job turnover
  - Absenteeism
  - Low morale
  - Deterioration in the quality of care provided

Maslach, C., Jackson, S.E. 1981
Background

- Prior Research
  - Nurses
  - Physicians, Medical Residents and Medical Students
  - Physician Assistant (PA) Educators
- Clinically Practicing PAs
  - Little is known (1 study, Air Force, Family Practice)
  - Early career burnout (ECB) unknown
    - For this study ECB was defined as: Physician Assistants practicing within their first certification cycle (original 6 year cycle).
- Contributing factors
  - Work-life balance
  - Depression
  - Personality
Objectives of the Study

1) Determine the prevalence of ECB in PAs practicing within their first certification cycle (original 6 year cycle).
2) Identify factors contributing to the development of ECB.
3) Determine respondents’ opinions on their preparedness for clinical practice and the value of adding education on factors contributing to career burnout to current PA curricula.
Methods

• Electronic survey invitations emailed to PA’s within their first certification cycle (graduating 2007-2012)
  • 4,000 practicing AAPA members
  • 50 AAPA constituent organizations
  • Online services

• Survey Instruments
  • Maslach Burnout Inventory
  • Areas of Worklife Survey
Instrument:
Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS)

- 22 item survey
- 3 validated subscales
  - Emotional Exhaustion (EE): Feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by work
  - Depersonalization (DP): Unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care, treatment or instruction
  - Personal Accomplishment (PA): Assesses feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people
- Burnout is conceptualized as a continuous variable, which ranges from low to moderate to high degrees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Burnout Syndrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>&lt; 18</td>
<td>19-26</td>
<td>&gt; 27</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>&lt; 5</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>&gt; 10</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>&lt; 40</td>
<td>39-34</td>
<td>&lt; 33</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maslach, C., Jackson, S.E. 1981
Instrument: Areas of Worklife Survey

• 29 item survey
  • Problematic relationship between the person and their environment is described as an imbalance or mismatch.
  • The greater the perceived gap between the perceived congruence, the greater the likelihood of burnout

• Degree of Congruence between the person and six domains (subscales) of his / her job environment
  1. Workload
  2. Control
  3. Reward
  4. Community
  5. Fairness
  6. Values

Instrument: Additional Questions (Survey Monkey)

- Level of agreement (5-point Likert) scales pertaining to respondents’ opinions of their preparedness to handle the stressors of clinical practice:
  1) Stress–management education during the course of my PA education might have better equipped me to handle the stress of practicing medicine
  2) Additional education in regard to managing medical legal risk might have helped reduce the amount of stress that I experience related to practicing medicine
  3) Additional training in working within a complex healthcare system might have better prepared me for the realities of medical practice
Respondents

- 4,000 early career PA’s invited to participate
- 50 AAPA State Constituent Organizations
  - 10 States agreed to forward to their members
- Participants MBI-HSS and AWI
  - 215 survey responses
  - 148 completed
- Participants Survey Monkey
  - 110 responses and completions
### Results: MBI

![Image](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion (EE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Career Physician Assistants</td>
<td>29.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians (6)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP Physician Assistants(2)</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP Nurse Practitioners(2)</td>
<td>15.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP Physicians(2)</td>
<td>16.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Students(1)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine Normative Data(4)</td>
<td>22.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The numbers represent the Emotional Exhaustion scores for each group.
Results: MBI
Results: MBI

![Bar chart showing Personal Accomplishment (PA) for different groups.](image)
# Results: AWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>50th Percentile (literature)</th>
<th>Study Sample (Mean ± SD)</th>
<th>Level of Experienced Congruence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workload</strong></td>
<td>The amount of work to be done in a given time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8 ± 1.13</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td>The opportunity to make choices and decisions, to solve problems, and to contribute to the fulfillment of responsibilities.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>4.15 ± 0.92</td>
<td>Low Mismatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reward</strong></td>
<td>Recognition - financial and social-for contributions on the job.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.65 ± 1.91</td>
<td>Moderate-Low Mismatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>The quality of an organization's social environment.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5 ± 0.71</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fairness</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which the organization has consistent and equitable rules for everyone.</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>4.35 ± 0.21</td>
<td>Low Mismatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>What is important to the organization and to its members.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.71</td>
<td>Low Mismatch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Results: Survey Monkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>n=</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress-management education during the course of my PA education might have better equipped me to handle the stress of practicing medicine.</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>33.90%</td>
<td>37.60%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional education in regard to managing medical legal risk might have helped reduce the amount of stress that I experience related to practicing medicine.</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>21.10%</td>
<td>50.50%</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional training in working within a complex healthcare sytem might have better prepared me for the realities of medical practice.</td>
<td>4.50%</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>18.20%</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
<td>20.90%</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

- Burnout may exist in the early clinical careers of Physician Assistants
- High level of emotional exhaustion demonstrated
- Perceived personal congruence with job reward, control, fairness and values
- Perceived incongruence with job workload and community
- PAs are either already experiencing career burnout or are significantly at risk
- Identify and prevent emotional exhaustion and career burnout in early career PAs
  - Education on the complexities of the healthcare delivery system and medical legal risk.
Additional Considerations

- Limitations to the current study include
  - Difficulty sampling practicing PAs
  - Limited response rate
  - Self-selection bias (only those with ECB may respond)
  - Self-report bias (the subjective nature of the outcome variables)
- AAPA Specialty Constituent Organizations
Questions?

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