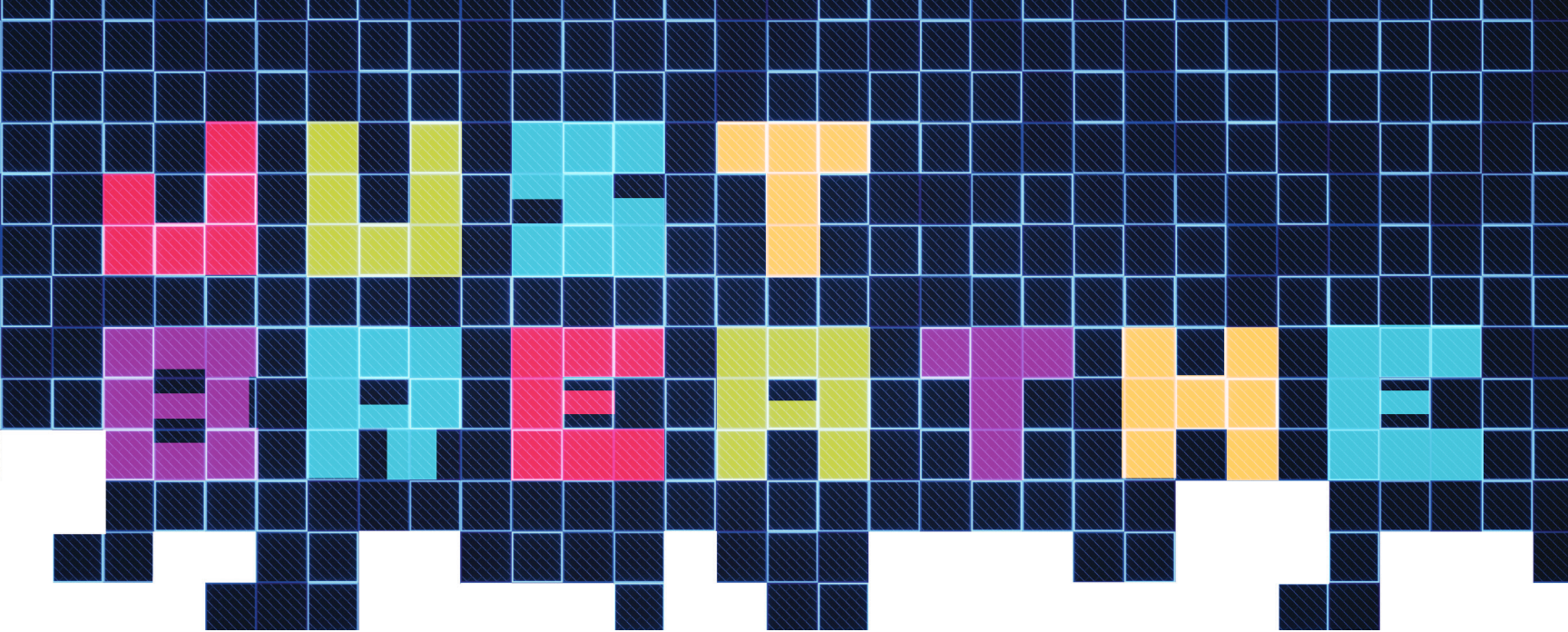




Strategies to ward off burnout and enhance physician well-being.

BY JULIA A. ROSDAHL, MD, PHD; AND KAREN KINGSOLVER, PHD

Physician burnout has become an increasingly popular subject in the media because it is on the rise, increasing from 45% to 54% between 2011 and 2014.¹

Ophthalmology is not immune, with a reported prevalence of about 50%, which is similar to that of other surgical specialties, such as neurosurgery and general surgery.

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.² It can result in loss of productivity and loss of workforce, with physicians choosing to leave medicine.³ In short, burnout is bad for our patients, for our medical practices, and for us as individuals.

Combatting burnout is a big job that requires local and national attention. However, there are steps that individual physicians can take to become more resilient in these changing times.

MINDFULNESS 101

One increasingly popular strategy for fostering resilience is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention, on purpose and without judgment, to the present moment,

according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of The Center for Mindfulness.

Practicing mindfulness helps participants train their brains to pause during stressful situations so that they can respond instead of react. Interventions that include mindfulness have been proven to reduce physician burnout.⁴

You can try practicing mindfulness by simply taking a breath and paying attention to the sensations in your body. Breathing meditations can also be found on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7J5NV26THU) or in the app store on your phone (www.10percenthappier.com). But just about any activity, such as eating and walking, can be done mindfully.

An exercise in mindfulness. Find a ripe summer fruit. Before your first bite, smell the fruit and consider all of the effort—from the sunlight and the soil to the farmer and grocer—that brought that fruit to you. As you take the first bite, notice the feel of the fruit on your teeth, lips, and tongue. Before chewing, hold that bite in your mouth, noticing the texture and flavors, and then chew slowly to savor and appreciate it. It is a challenge to eat a whole meal mindfully, but even mindfully

eating the first few bites can be a resilience-building, mindful practice.

For physicians, being on constant autopilot is a common coping technique, but it can be exhausting. Next time you are in the clinic or the OR, take a micro-pause to connect with one of your senses; this can give you a needed reset on busy days. Try using the feel of a doorknob or the feel of hand sanitizer to remind you to notice the temperature and other sensations of touch. Notice the feeling of the breath you are taking. These micro-pauses are quick, life-enhancing resilience practices that go a long way.

DON'T SKIMP ON SELF-CARE

Mindfulness is just one of many ways physicians can enhance their well-being. Recognize that self-care is important. Create a wellness plan for yourself to foster your own resilience; in addition to a mindfulness practice, many physicians also thrive by connecting with others, such as friends, family members, and patients, and by connecting the work that they do to their core values and vision for their lives. It can be overwhelming, so simply start with the breath. ■

PHYSICIAN WELL-BEING: SURVEY RESULTS



42%

of physician respondents reported **feeling burned out**, while 15% reported **experiencing clinical or colloquial depression**.¹

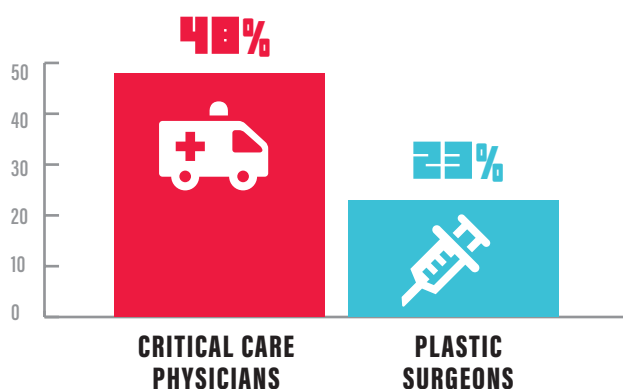
14%

of those surveyed reported feeling **both burned out and depressed**.¹



33%

of ophthalmologists reported **experiencing burnout**.¹



The **highest rate** of burnout was seen among **critical care physicians**, while the lowest rate occurred among **plastic surgeons**.¹



MORE FEMALE

physicians reported **burnout** (48%) than male physicians (38%).¹



Half of physicians **between the ages of 45 and 54 years** reported burnout.¹

56%



of physicians cited **too many bureaucratic tasks** as a contributing factor to their burnout.¹

35%



of physicians said **increased compensation** would help reduce burnout.¹

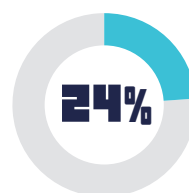
31%



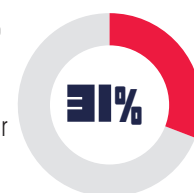
of physicians said **more manageable hours** would help reduce burnout.¹



HALF of physicians said they **use exercise to cope with burnout**; 46% cited **talking with family or close friends** and 42% cited **sleep** as methods to cope with burnout.¹



Just 24% of **male physicians** and 31% of **female physicians** reported that they had **sought professional help** in the past or were currently seeking or planning to seek professional help for burnout, depression, or both.¹



Burnout, dissatisfaction with work-life integration, and dissatisfaction with electronic health records were independent predictors of intent to **reduce hours or leave current practice**.²

1 in 5 physicians plan to **reduce clinical hours over the next year**,



while **1 in 50** plan to leave medicine in the next 2 years to pursue a different career.²



HALF of physicians are **very to extremely happy outside of work**.³

37%

of ophthalmologists reported that they were **happy at work**. They were the **most likely group** to report being very to extremely happy at work.¹

49%



of physicians take **3 to 4 weeks of vacation** per year, while one-third take 2 weeks or less.³

35%



of physicians reported **exercising two to three times per week**.³

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JULIA A. ROSDAHL, MD, PHD

- Associate Professor of Ophthalmology and Director of Patient Education, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
- julia.rosdahl@duke.edu
- Financial disclosure: None

KAREN KINGSOLVER, PHD

- Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
- Financial disclosure: None