

Medical specialties with the highest burnout rates

JAN 15, 2016

Staff News Writer

Work-related burnout is a pervasive problem among physicians—and it's worsening across all specialties, according to a recent national study. Learn how burnout has increased in just three years and which specialties reported the highest rates of burnout. Where does yours fall on the list?

Physician burnout experts at the AMA and the Mayo Clinic conducted a survey of 6,880 physicians to “evaluate the prevalence of burnout and physicians’ satisfaction with work-life balance compared to the general U.S. population relative to 2011 and 2014,” according to the study, which was recently published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.

“In 2011, we conducted a national study measuring burnout and other dimensions of well-being in U.S. physicians as well as the general U.S. working population. At the time of that study, approximately 45 percent of U.S. physicians met criteria for burnout,” the study authors wrote.

When a follow-up survey was conducted in 2014, 54.4 percent of physicians reported at least one sign of burnout. Physicians also reported lower rates of satisfaction with work-life balance in 2014 compared to a similar sample of physicians in 2011. All physicians in the study were assessed using questions on the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

“Substantial variation in the rate of burnout was observed by specialty, with the highest rates observed among many specialties at the front line of access to care,” the study authors noted.

Which specialties have the highest burnout rates?

Compared to 2011, burnout rates were higher for all specialties in 2014. In fact, nearly a dozen specialties experienced more than a 10 percent increase in burnout over those three years:

- Family medicine (51.3 percent of physicians reported burnout in 2011 versus 63.0 percent in 2014)

- General pediatrics (35.3 percent versus 46.3 percent)
- Urology (41.2 percent versus 63.6 percent)
- Orthopedic surgery (48.3 percent versus 59.6 percent)
- Dermatology (31.8 percent versus 56.5 percent)
- Physical medicine and rehabilitation (47.4 percent versus 63.3 percent)
- Pathology (37.6 percent versus 52.5 percent)
- Radiology (47.7 percent versus 61.4 percent)
- General surgery subspecialties (42.4 percent versus 52.7 percent).

Authors of the study also observed “substantial variation” in satisfaction rates based on specialty. In 2014, physicians across all specialties reported lower satisfaction with work-life balance, except for physicians in general surgery and OB/GYN.

“Burnout among physicians also varied by career stage, with the highest rate among midcareer physicians,” according to the study.

While burnout rates varied among physicians based on their career stages and specialties, authors of the study noted that burnout still proved to be more prevalent among physicians than the general U.S. working population. This is “a finding that persisted after adjusting for age, sex, hours worked and level of education,” they wrote.

Read the full study for more observations on burnout.

Also, don't miss these resources on burnout and physician wellness

- Learn the 7 signs of burnout and how to prevent them in your practice.
- Review these burnout busters to increase physician satisfaction.
- Check out this online module to learn how to measure and respond to burnout in your practice and a second module to discover how to increase physician resiliency.
- The AMA's STEPS Forward collection also offers modules to improve elements of your practice that can be risk factors for burnout, such as improving work flow through team documentation, expanded rooming and discharge protocols, pre-visit planning, and synchronized prescription renewal.