Background  As described in Fast Fact #167, burnout is a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach 1982). This Fast Fact will explore symptoms of burnout and its personal and professional consequences. Fast Facts #169 and 170 will describe avoidance and assessment of burnout.

Symptoms of each sequential stage of burnout
- **Stress Arousal:** anxiety, irritability, hypertension, bruxism, insomnia, palpitations, forgetfulness, and headaches.
- **Energy Conservation:** Work tardiness, procrastination, resentment, morning fatigue, social withdrawal, increased alcohol or caffeine consumption, and apathy.
- **Exhaustion:** Chronic sadness, depression, chronic heartburn, diarrhea, constipation, chronic mental and physical fatigue, the desire to “drop out” of society.

Consequences
- **Personal**
  - Depletion of emotional and physical resources.
  - Negative self-image: feelings of incompetence and lack of achievement.
  - Self-neglect: 35% of Johns Hopkins’ medical graduates had no a regular source of health care.
  - Questioning of previously held spiritual beliefs.
  - Neglect of family and social obligations.
  - Mental Illness: anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicide.
    - Substance Abuse: MD lifetime risk is 10-14%.
    - MD suicide rates similar to general population for both genders
    - Relative Risk of MD suicide versus other professionals
      - Male MDs: 1.1-3.4
      - Female MDs: 2.5-5.7
      - Female MDs complete suicide as often as male MDs
- **Professional**
  - Longer Work hours: *If I work harder, it will get better.*
  - Withdrawal, absenteeism, and reduced productivity.
  - Depersonalization: attempt to create distance between self and patients/trainees by ignoring the qualities that make them unique individuals.
  - Loss of professional boundaries leading to inappropriate relationships with patients/trainees.
  - Compromised patient care. Burnout has been linked to
    - More medical errors
    - Diminished sense of empathy for patients
    - Impaired decision-making
    - 45% of University of Washington residents who self-report burnout also report providing “suboptimal care.”

References:

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