



For you, your career, and your life

# RAP

Resident Assistance Program Newsletter  
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## Burnout and Depression: This Isn't What I Bargained For

Tired. Hungry. Stressed. Am I going to feel like this during my whole residency?

The potential for burnout exists at any point in a physician's career. Yet the conditions doctors endure throughout residency amplify the risk of burnout.

### Is This You?

Burnout is a state of mental and physical exhaustion related to work or care giving activities, report the authors of "Burnout During Residency Training: A Literature Review," published in the Journal of Graduate Medical Education. "Burnout during

residency training has gained significant attention secondary to concerns regarding job performance and patient care."<sup>1</sup>

"Research shows that rates of overall burnout among U.S. physicians approach 40 percent, more than 10 percentage points higher than the general population," reports the American Medical Association.

A September 2015 Time magazine article described residents as "stressed, burned out and depressed," adding that "when they suffer, so do their patients." The article sums up the reality many residents experience. "This has long been the ordeal of a young doctor: overworked, sleep-deprived and steeped in a culture that demands that you suck it up."<sup>2</sup>

### Warning Signs

Stress, along with sleep deprivation, sensory overload and the lack of social opportunities to decompress can all be part of the residency experience, says Ellen Meier. The nurse practitioner who has been a medical group

Burnout is very real, and it can have devastating consequences. When mental and physical exhaustion feel insurmountable, it's okay to admit that you need help. Self-help may not be enough, and it can be reassuring to speak with a professional who understands the rigors of residency. A professional can help you gain perspective about all the reasons you chose a career in medicine. Remember you have a resource to get you through it: your local, caring and confidential Resident Assistance Program (RAP).  
Contact RAP: 813-870-3344

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administrator for many years is now a Vice President for The Advisory Board Company in Washington, D.C. "Warning signs for burnout include sleep and eating disorders, inability to focus, and fatigue," says Meier.

### Effects Can Be Long-Lasting

There are serious effects of physician burnout and

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"It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it."

- Lou Holtz

<sup>1</sup> J Grad Med Educ. 2009 Dec; 1(2): 236-242. Accessed online November 30, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Doctors on Life Support," Time; Sept. 7, 2015, by Mandy Oaklander. Accessed online Sept. 24, 2015.

## “Remedy for Burnout” by Dr. Starla Fitch

A few years after landing her “dream job,” Dr. Starla Fitch faced life-altering physician burnout. It made her question everything she thought she knew. She found a way to remember why she went into medicine in the first place. And now she helps others in the medical profession do the same.

“Remedy for Burnout: 7 Prescriptions Doctors Use to Find Meaning in Medicine” shares Dr. Fitch’s story and those of fellow physicians who tapped into their own passions and talents and discovered the meaning in medicine unique to each of them. Her seven prescriptions provide actionable advice that doctors can take to assess their current situations and reconnect with the reasons why they put on their white coats every day.

Source: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

## Your Resident Assistance Program

The RAP newsletter is provided as a benefit to medical residents at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and their dependents.

*We welcome your comments on newsletter topics, however, we cannot provide RAP services by email.*

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## Burnout and Depression...

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depression in a healthcare setting. “Burnout decreases quality of patient care and patient satisfaction, increases medical errors, and can be a factor in physician turnover, divorce, drug and alcohol addiction and suicide,” says Meier, who has been a manager in physician organizations throughout her career.

“Physicians can become immune to the pain and trauma of patients they are treating,” she says. “Some become cold and uncaring. Some turn away from clinical medicine and become medical consultants, informatics experts or academic researchers/teachers. This isn’t bad, but if we can prevent burnout, more will stay in clinical medicine.”

### Actions You Can Take

There are no simple solutions, but there are some actions residents can take to maintain physical and mental health.

“Delegate to others on the care team,” Meier recommends. “Engage in activities that recharge your personal energy. Exercise. Celebrate ‘wins’ and successes. Keep a journal. Journaling may take some time, but it helps objectify the present and promotes the ability to focus on the long term, rather than the short term. Spend time with loved ones and friends. Meditate. Get

organized. Create boundaries between work and home. And commit to a quality nutrition/meal planning regimen.”

One solution used at Stanford School of Medicine, Time magazine reports, is a program that promotes “psychological well-being, physical health and mentoring.” The program also enlists senior residents to mentor junior residents.<sup>2</sup>

Having a mentor can be an exceptionally good way for residents to gain perspective, encouragement and wisdom from a more senior physician who has been in a similar situation and survived it.

### New AMA Resource

The AMA has recognized the issue of physician burnout and now offers interactive technology to address it. Earlier this year, the AMA introduced STEPS Forward, an online “practice transformation series” aimed at restoring the joy of medicine. Physicians can access the collection of interactive, online educational modules to help address common practice challenges at [www.STEPSforward.org](http://www.STEPSforward.org), and also earn continuing medical education credit.

### Resources

The Happy MD Blog, by Dike Drummond, M.D.  
[www.TheHappyMD.com](http://www.TheHappyMD.com)

Remedy for Burnout, by Starla Fitch, M.D., Langdon Street Press, November 2014.

The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living, by Amit Sood, M.D., M.Sc.; Da Capo Press, 2013.