

TOP

WAYS TO
AVOID
BURNOUT

The concept of “burnout,” which is characterized by workers’ exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of efficacy,¹ has integrated thoroughly into the lexicon of employment and workplace experiences.

A 2011 survey of physicians found that 87% of its more than 2,000 respondents reported feeling moderate to severe levels of stress and burnout.² Given the similarities in expectations and environment in veterinary and human medicine, it is evident that avoiding burnout in veterinary workplaces is essential.

Use the following strategies to decrease the chance of burnout and increase work satisfaction and organizational efficacy in your practice.

1 Address communication and collegial relationships.

Engage in conversations with team members about communication patterns in your practice. Elicit feedback regarding the strengths of the communication process, and identify areas of stress and miscommunication. Build on the strengths, and make concerted efforts to decrease negative communication. More time is often spent with team members than with family and friends. Working relationships need nourishment to create an environment where team members want to build careers.

2 Increase opportunities for autonomy and strengths-based contributions.

Explore options to further engage team members in meaningful and independent work. Share responsibilities that build upon individual

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- Integrate wellness activities into the workday.
- Strive for a centered work–life balance.
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strengths and tap into areas of passion to create a more vibrant, creative, and effective environment. For example, ask a group of team members to identify a practice project, develop a needs-assessment plan and options to address the needs, and implement interventions to effect change. The project could reflect a small change within a large practice or a significant change to, for example, a clinical system.

3 Integrate wellness activities into the workday.

Practices small and large can identify ways (see strategy 2) to increase team members' wellness and implement self-care programs. Consider starting the day with a 10-minute stretching and mindfulness activity, initiating a 25-minute walk during lunch, or creating "left-over potluck days" when team members share their week's leftovers. Not only do you avoid eating the same soup for the fourth day in a row—you may enjoy the communal process of a shared meal that requires very little preparation.

4 Strive for a centered work-life balance.

Exhaustion, a key aspect of burnout, may stem from both work and life experiences. Assess your own work-life balance and identify changes you can implement; for example, read a nonwork-related novel rather than a professional journal before bed, or set aside 30 minutes to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea, either in solitude or with a spouse or friend, before starting your work day. Many people find they are better able to concentrate and actively contribute at work when they feel they have protected time to *not* work.

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5 Evaluate options for change.

If the above strategies fail to decrease feelings of stress and burnout, consider possibilities such as exploring other opportunities within your current practice or assessing new career opportunities. Change may be daunting, but the cost of burnout's long-term effects may far exceed the price of pursuing a new position or career.

Conclusion

Identifying burnout can be challenging. If you feel it is affecting you personally or that it has become part of your practice culture, intervention may be beneficial. Use the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which provides personalized feedback regarding burnout levels.³ Consider forming a group of friends or practice team members to study a book

or article about increasing job satisfaction, identifying strengths, and avoiding burnout.

Burnout is avoidable and reversible. Actively invest in your career, relationships, and holistic health by using the above strategies to move toward greater job satisfaction, efficacy, and collegiality. 

Editor's note: *Stacie Fishell Rowan, PhD (Counseling Psychology), is a therapist at the University of Oregon Counseling and Testing Center. She has expertise in communication and relationship skills and has previously provided clinical, educational, and communication training to veterinary professionals.*

References

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