



Combating Nursing Burnout: A Quality Improvement Project



Heather Randolph, Maddy McElfresh, Addie Short, Cailey Dahlquist, Jenna Bartley; Suzi White, DNP-RN, PHCNS-BC, Associate Professor of Nursing, Mentor

NURB 361: Introduction to Nursing Research, Baccalaureate Nursing Program

Introduction:

Nursing burnout costs the health care industry roughly 14 billion dollars a year. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically increased burnout rates. Many nurses feel overworked and underappreciated; this has caused a negative impact as it is influencing the rates of burnout among hospital staffing globally. Over half a million registered nurses have already left their profession nationwide due to stress and workload (Bruyneel, Smith, Tack, & Pirson, 2021). Burnout has diminished staff, depleted resources, and decreased quality of care.

Definition:

Nursing burnout is the state of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion caused by sustained work-related stressors such as long hours, pressures of decision making, large patient ratios, and the strain of caring for critical patients.

Problem Statement:

Despite nursing burnout having a known negative impact on both employees and their patients, little is known about specific resources that can help nursing staff combat this issue. Specifically, there is little data on what employers can do to help their nurses and on what nurses can do on an individual basis to help combat burnout.

Desired Outcomes:

- There will be a 15% decrease in reported nursing burnout in hospitals receiving interventions in the next year.
- There will be a 25% decrease in negative patient outcomes related to nursing burnout in hospitals receiving interventions in the next year.
- All employers will implement at least 2 new policies to improve nurses access to resources to prevent nursing burnout within 6 months of receiving the information.

Review of Literature:

A literature review was conducted examining 40 primary studies presented within the last five years. The five main focal points identified were as follows: ICU nursing burnout, nursing burnout cost, effects of nursing burnout on patient outcomes, nursing burnout related to COVID-19, and measures to prevent nursing burnout. Of the 40 studies reviewed, 23 were quantitative studies and 17 were qualitative studies. All of the studies had a common consensus that nursing burnout is a rising problem and that helpful interventions to combat burnout need to be prioritized to optimize the healthcare workforce.

A common theme among the studies was the effects of gratitude given by supervisors and patients on job satisfaction, which is a factor that can reduce the rates of burnout. As stated in one study, receiving recognition from colleagues (verbal encouragement or pay) or patients and relatives showed to lower the value of the burnout scale among the sample group (Diehl, Rieger, Letzel, Schablon, Nienhaus, Pinzon, & Dietz, 2021).

Nurses with burnout may have impaired attention and memory that decrease their recall and attention to detail. Another common theme among the studies was that burnout causes care quality to deteriorate because health care providers have more pressing emotional issues, such as exhaustion, lethargy, and depression. A study found that "each additional patient per nurse increases 30-day mortality odds by 7%" during the pandemic (Bettencourt, McHugh, Sloane, & Aiken, 2020). Another study found medical errors occur twice as more often when there were moderate to high levels of burnout (Hall, Johnson, Watt, Tsipa, & O'Connor, 2018). Health care providers experiencing burnout are often detached from their work, leaving them liable to have more agitated or aggressive attitudes towards their work. Such attitudes can harm patient care and team communication, both of which are vital to providing quality healthcare.

Hospital administration needs to monitor staff stress to allow them to better develop and implement appropriate interventions. This effort involves implementing programs, such as support wellness and resilience training. In addition to managers and supervisors taking preventable actions, nurses need to take extra precautions on their own to avoid burnout. Another common theme among the studies was that nurses must prioritize their own personal physical and mental health to avoid burnout, such as engaging in yoga, exercise, meditation, and journaling (Alexander, Rollins, Walker, Wong, & Pennings, 2017). These practices can offer physical and mental benefits to nurses and help them adapt and face adversity.

Interventions:

- A teaching tool to identify and provide resources to combat burnout was designed.
- Main points:
 1. Signs and symptoms of nursing burnout syndrome to promote awareness among health care providers.
 2. Prevention strategies such as setting boundaries, delegating, and practicing yoga.

What Are the Causes of Nurse Burnout?

- **Long Work Hours and Short Breaks:** Nurses often work 12-hour shifts, a practice that has been found to contribute to stress, fatigue, and poor performance.
- **Patient Acuity:** Heavy nursing workload negatively affects nursing job satisfaction and patient safety, as a result, it contributes to high turnover rates.
- **Insufficient Work Environments:** Nurses working in poorly managed health facilities, may feel as if their voices aren't heard. This can lead to negative and detached feelings about the workplace.
- **Emotional Stress:** Caring for chronically sick patients each day takes a toll on emotional well-being. If nurses lack support and resources to process their emotions, they can quickly experience burnout and compassion fatigue.

Common Consequences of Nurse Burnout

- **High Turnover rates:** The growth shortage of nurses is exacerbating. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects more than 500,000 nurses to retire by 2022. 70% of nurses report feeling exhausted and burnt out at some point in their career.
- **Poor Quality of Care:** Nurses experiencing burnout feel unappreciated and detached from the workplace, experience lapses in judgement and decision-making, and become disconnected from their patients.
- **Increased Costs for Health Care Organizations:** If exhausted nurses leave their jobs or make mistakes, health care organizations incur the costs of those deficiencies. Burnout costs healthcare agencies about \$14 billion annually.

The Impact of Nurse Burnout

- **Decreased patient safety**
- **Increased patient mortality**
- **Increased healthcare costs**

Nursing Burnout
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What is Nursing Burnout?

- The World Health Organization (WHO) describes burnout as an occupational phenomenon in its international classification of diseases.
- It is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed. It includes three main characteristics:
 1. Mental, physical, and/or emotional exhaustion
 2. Negative feelings towards one's job
 3. Reduced effectiveness in one's profession

What are the signs of Nursing Burnout?

- Always feeling tired or fatigued
- Dreading going to work
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Feeling apathetic about helping others
- Constant dread or panic about work
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of sleep
- Increased anxiety and depression

Strategies to Prevent Nursing Burnout

- **Document your stressors:** Journaling can help relieve stress by documenting and working through frustrations.
- **Practice self-care:** Take time to exercise, cook healthier meals, and improve sleep.
- **Set boundaries:** Allow time for family, hobbies, and recreation without the stressors of the workplace.
- **Speak with co-workers:** Other nurses may also be experiencing burnout. Express your emotions and ask others for support and advice.

Registered Nurse Shortages by State, Projected
Differences between supply and demand expected by 2020

State	Year	Most	Least
Alabama	2020	1,000	1,000
Alaska	2020	1,000	1,000
Arizona	2020	1,000	1,000
Arkansas	2020	1,000	1,000
California	2020	1,000	1,000
Colorado	2020	1,000	1,000
Connecticut	2020	1,000	1,000
Delaware	2020	1,000	1,000
District of Columbia	2020	1,000	1,000
Florida	2020	1,000	1,000
Georgia	2020	1,000	1,000
Hawaii	2020	1,000	1,000
Idaho	2020	1,000	1,000
Illinois	2020	1,000	1,000
Indiana	2020	1,000	1,000
Iowa	2020	1,000	1,000
Kansas	2020	1,000	1,000
Kentucky	2020	1,000	1,000
Louisiana	2020	1,000	1,000
Maine	2020	1,000	1,000
Maryland	2020	1,000	1,000
Massachusetts	2020	1,000	1,000
Michigan	2020	1,000	1,000
Minnesota	2020	1,000	1,000
Mississippi	2020	1,000	1,000
Missouri	2020	1,000	1,000
Montana	2020	1,000	1,000
Nebraska	2020	1,000	1,000
Nevada	2020	1,000	1,000
New Hampshire	2020	1,000	1,000
New Jersey	2020	1,000	1,000
New Mexico	2020	1,000	1,000
New York	2020	1,000	1,000
North Carolina	2020	1,000	1,000
North Dakota	2020	1,000	1,000
Ohio	2020	1,000	1,000
Oklahoma	2020	1,000	1,000
Oregon	2020	1,000	1,000
Pennsylvania	2020	1,000	1,000
Rhode Island	2020	1,000	1,000
South Carolina	2020	1,000	1,000
South Dakota	2020	1,000	1,000
Tennessee	2020	1,000	1,000
Texas	2020	1,000	1,000
Utah	2020	1,000	1,000
Vermont	2020	1,000	1,000
Virginia	2020	1,000	1,000
Washington	2020	1,000	1,000
West Virginia	2020	1,000	1,000
Wisconsin	2020	1,000	1,000
Wyoming	2020	1,000	1,000

Conclusion:

Burnout within the nursing field has become a progressive issue that has negative effects on both workers within health care and patient outcomes. This quality improvement project aimed to improve patient outcomes while improving mental health for nurses. A literature review of 40 studies was completed to investigate burnout among nurses. This review indicated that nurses are overworked while lacking adequate resources to prevent burnout. This issue needed to be addressed especially due to the current pandemic resulting in increased patient admission rates and high patient acuity. The quality improvement project resulted in the development of an educational tool designed to address the issue of nursing burnout among staff at a large urban teaching hospital. This tool was shared with nursing staff and placed within nurses' stations to increase awareness and provide interventions, such as delegation, exercise, and setting boundaries, to combat nursing burnout.

