

Meaning in Medicine: A Narrative-Based, Longitudinal Course for Fourth Year Medical Students Aimed at Preventing Burnout and Finding Meaning in Medicine

Stephanie Harlow MD¹, Rachael Libertin MD¹, Marisa Miller MD¹, Rachel Welch MD¹, Jill Azok MD¹, Jessica Goldstein MD¹, Sarah Ronis MD¹

¹Department of Pediatrics, Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio

Introduction

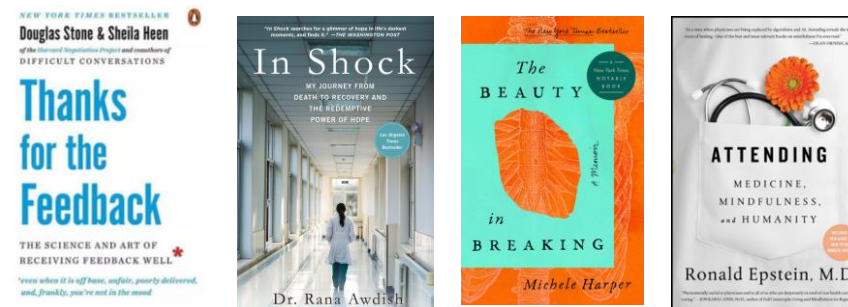
- Rates of physician burnout remain as high as 43% as of 2017, and physicians are significantly more likely to be burnt out and dissatisfied with their work-life integration than US adults in other fields
- Multiple causes of burnout have been identified in medical literature, including loss of autonomy and a sense of powerlessness, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, lack of meaning at work, organizational climate, female sex, and minority race
- Factors which promote resilience have also been identified, including improved communication skills, a supportive working climate and sense of belongingness, adaptability, and habits such as mindfulness and self-forgiveness
- Despite knowledge of both the prevalence of burnout and previous research on how to prevent burnout, structured education for medical students around physician burnout and meaningful prevention strategies remains lacking
- **Purpose:** To examine primary literature, didactic texts from fields of psychology and business, and physician narratives in a discussion-based longitudinal course to identify and dissect the many causes and effects of physician burnout as well as understand and practice employing meaningful prevention strategies, such as mindfulness and growth mindset
- **Hypothesis:** By the end of the course, students will have a demonstrably broader and more nuanced understanding of the causes and effects of burnout, as well as more robust strategies with which to prevent it

Methods

- A Pubmed search on topics related to course content, including the following, was completed: burnout, shame, growth mindset, meaning making, grief, mindfulness, and professionalism
- Course content was selected based on relationship to topics identified in the primary literature
- Course structure was determined based on thematic arc, with initial focus on practical skills applicable to physician narratives
- Primary articles were assigned to associated main course content based on applicable themes
- Discussion and reflections questions drafted by course facilitators based on topics related to each book

Course Description and Outline

- To run during the 2021-2022 academic year
- Available to all medical students at Case Western Reserve School of Medicine and Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine
- Monthly meetings for which students will read one assigned text plus supplemental material, including excerpts from other texts as well as primary medical literature
- Students to prepare beforehand by responding to guided reflection question
- Discussion to be based on guided reflection questions as well as student-driven questions and insights on how each text relates to the themes of the course
- Pre- and post-course reflections with open ended questions to be completed by participants regarding their understanding of the causes and effects of burnout, their experiences of burnout, and meaningful coping strategies they have developed during their medical education, whether formally or informally
- Primary Texts:
 - Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well, even when it's off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood by Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen
 - The Culture Code: The Secret of Highly Successful Groups by Daniel Coyle
 - Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts. by Brené Brown
 - What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine by Daniel Ofri, MD
 - This Is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Medical Resident by Adam Kay
 - The Beauty in Breaking: A Memoir by Michele Harper, MD
 - In Shock: My Journey from Death to Recovery and the Redemptive Power of Hope by Rana Awdish, MD
 - When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi, MD
 - Attending: Medicine, Mindfulness, and Humanity by Ronald Epstein, MD



Measures of Efficacy

- Qualitative comparison of pre- and post-course free response questions regarding participants' understanding of burnout, its meaning, its causes and effects, as well as meaningful prevention strategies
- Qualitative assessment of monthly reflection assignments to determine use of skills for burnout prevention being discussed in the course
- Field notes to taken by course facilitators on salient points related to students' demonstration of deeper understanding of burnouts' causes and effects as well as practice of discussed strategies
- Possible use of formal Maslach Burnout Scale pre- and post-course to assess trends in real-time burnout levels

Anticipated Outcomes and Further Considerations

- Students will demonstrate a more robust and nuanced understanding of burnout through re-interpretation of their third year experiences through the lens of the primary texts being read as well as their understanding of the evidence-based description of burnout identified in the primary literature assigned throughout the course
 - We anticipate responses will demonstrate a more complex and complete understanding of burnout, a heightened awareness of the prevalence of burnout, and an insight into individual habits and systems-based practices which contribute to burnout
- Students will demonstrate their use of practices such as growth mindset, mindfulness, meaning making through narrative formation, and their ability to shape and create culture, as evidence by their narrative reflections and items shared during discussion

References

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