Dealing with Burnout
A Guide for Ensuring the Health of Your Business
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Introduction
The independent pharmacy landscape isn’t what it used to be. Changes in reimbursement, competition, and other economic variables have made running a community pharmacy more demanding. You’re challenged to do more while often receiving less, causing a lot of stress. On the other hand, when patients recognize your dedication and thank you for helping to solve their medical problems, you’re reminded of why the hassles are worth your effort. This guide helps you recognize burnout and focuses on tangible ways you can spend more time enjoying being an independent pharmacist.

Know When You’ve Hit Burnout

Studies show human service professionals are particularly vulnerable to burnout.¹ As a community pharmacist, you experience pressure daily from dealing with insurance companies, increased paperwork, ensuring safe dispensing, controlling inventory, and more. Additionally, it can be frustrating because your personal commitment to your patients’ care isn’t always reflected in their outcomes.² While you’re usually aware of being under stress, you don’t always notice when burnout happens. The symptoms can take months to surface.³

A Tale of 2 Types of Pharmacists
Read the quotes below from retail pharmacists on career planning websites giving advice to folks who are considering entering the profession. Which sounds more like you?⁴,⁵

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PHARMACIST A</th>
<th>PHARMACIST B</th>
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<tr>
<td>“I love being a pharmacist. I have been a pharmacist for 15 years and plan to continue for at least 15 more. Every day there is a different challenge and I always try to learn something new each day.”</td>
<td>“I have been a pharmacist for 30-plus years. Each year the stress increases and so does the demand. … Once we had it made; now we’re just highly paid pawns in a money exchange.”</td>
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<td>“After nearly 30 years I can honestly say I still enjoy being a pharmacist. Some patients I’d like to send elsewhere, but they are still my patients.”</td>
<td>“Pharmacy was a promising career 15 years ago when I qualified. Since then it has slowly but surely slipped. Added stress, added services, more paperwork, less staff hours, and it gets worse as time goes on.”</td>
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Is It More Than Just Stress?
Stress involves too much — too many pressures that demand too much of you physically and psychologically. But, stressed people can still imagine that if they can just get everything under control, they’ll feel better.

Excessive and prolonged stress can cause burnout. You feel emotionally, mentally, and physically drained for a prolonged period of time. You wonder why you’re doing what you’re doing career-wise, and feel like nothing you could do will change anything.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STRESS</th>
<th>BURNOUT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Emotions are over-reactive</td>
<td>Emotions are blunted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Produces hyperactivity</td>
<td>Produces futility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of energy</td>
<td>Loss of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to anxiety</td>
<td>Leads to detachment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Answer these questions to gauge your level of burnout:

- Do you have difficulty getting up in the morning?
- Are you always tired?
- Do you have unexplained aches and pains?
- Are you irritable or angry?
- Have you lashed out at coworkers, patients, or your family?
- Are you overwhelmed most of the time?
- Do you feel like you have less control over things?
- Are you stressed most of the time?
- Are you going through the motions just to get through the day?
- Have you lost interest in things that used to excite you?
- Do you frequently procrastinate?
- Has someone close to you said you seem apathetic?
- Do you feel that nothing you do can make a difference?

If you answered yes to three or more questions, and you’ve felt that way for an extended time, you are probably headed for job burnout — if you’re not already there.

Burnout Quiz

Burnout Is Bad for Your Health

Ignored or unaddressed job burnout can affect your physical and mental health, including:

- Fatigue or insomnia
- A negative impact on personal relationships or home life
- Depression or anxiety
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Heart disease or stroke
- Obesity
- Heart disease or stroke
- Obesity

If you think you may be experiencing job burnout, don’t ignore your symptoms. Consult your doctor or a mental health provider to identify or rule out any underlying health conditions.

Pitfalls Leading to Job Burnout

Several factors in the work environment can contribute to frustration and job dissatisfaction. The more of the six factors below that you experience, the more your odds of job burnout quickly climb.

- You’re accountable for the results you produce, but you have less and less say in how you accomplish the job.
- Your crushing workload, lack of resources, and tight timelines are no longer the exception but an almost daily occurrence, and you feel you have no work-life balance.
- You lack support, and/or your team dynamics are competitive and filled with unresolved conflicts.
- Work’s demands don’t harmonize with your sense of right and wrong.
- You feel that nothing you do can make a difference.
- It feels the rules have been rigged for another’s benefit and there’s nothing you can do to make things fair.
- Demand control
- Reward
- Fairness
- Values
- Community
- Demands

Burning Quiz

Burnout Quiz

Answer these questions to gauge your level of burnout:

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- Are you irritable or angry?
- Have you lashed out at coworkers, patients, or your family?
- Are you overwhelmed most of the time?
- Do you feel like you have less control over things?
- Are you stressed most of the time?
- Are you going through the motions just to get through the day?
- Have you lost interest in things that used to excite you?
- Are you bored or feel like work is a chore?
- Do you frequently procrastinate?
- Has someone close to you said you seem apathetic?
- Do you feel that nothing you do can make a difference?

If you answered yes to three or more questions, and you’ve felt that way for an extended time, you are probably headed for job burnout — if you’re not already there.
Preventing & Managing Job Burnout

The good news is that you have many strategies for dealing with burnout. In addition to attending to the basics — eating well, getting a good night’s sleep, exercising — here are some specific ideas for reversing the situation.

Find a special work project that’s meaningful to you. It may seem contrary to give yourself more to do when you’re already overworked. However, the intent of this suggestion is to remind you of the most satisfying parts of your job. The right ideas won’t feel like work. For example, hold a diabetes clinic, lecture at a senior community center, or create the business plan to add a new service like MTM.

Vent, especially to people who understand. Call up your peers working at other retail pharmacies. Go online and chat. Or, reconnect with buddies from pharmacy school. Many people who don’t work in a pharmacy won’t understand the stress and pressure of working in one, let alone being the person whose license is riding on everything. Talking with others in your profession can also help to shift your perspective to a more neutral place. And, if no one is available when you need to let off steam, write down your frustrations in a journal.

Treat yourself. Once in a while buy yourself something nice as a reward for waking up every morning and dealing with the daily grind. It doesn’t have to be expensive. Many pharmacists’ favorite self-treat is an indulgent lunch away from the pharmacy. (In fact, eating while at work is yet another contributor to burnout.)

Look for an activity away from the pharmacy. Choosing an activity that has nothing to do with your work— even if it’s temporary — helps you get more distance from the aggravations that build. Join a fantasy football league, sign up for a weekend golf clinic, or take your grandkids to the zoo. Many find doing something creative especially helpful. However you choose to spend your time, your family, spouse, and friends will also appreciate it.

Mentor. Pharmacy students or new pharmacists would be thrilled to learn from your experience. And, their enthusiasm and optimism can help you rekindle positive feelings about milestones you’ve achieved — whether it was your first job at a family friend’s pharmacy on the weekends or opening your doors for the first time. Offer to visit a pharmacy school that’s relatively close to you, or take on an intern. Teach the future of pharmacy about its past, and share your thoughts on what opportunities they have to contribute to health care today.

Take time off to rejuvenate. A 10-minute walk around the block on a particularly crazy day (or even 10 deep breaths) can make a difference. Stepping away briefly from a stressful activity will help you feel more in control. But sometimes taking a longer break — where you have the time and space to think about your hopes and future goals — is the only way. Are you neglecting something that is truly important to you? Burnout can be an opportunity to rediscover what can make you happier and to change course accordingly.

Pass the torch. If you realize you need a bigger, more permanent change, you could sell your store. Or, find a junior partner who sees new opportunities in the changing pharmacy landscape, and who can benefit from your experience. His or her new energy and perspective may help adjust yours and make your remaining time in community pharmacy enjoyable.
Laughter Is Good Medicine

Experts agree that keeping a good sense of humor gives you a buffer from burnout. Watch comedies, like an old favorite you haven’t seen in a few years. Ask friends to forward you any particularly funny cartoons or emails, especially ones about pharmacy like the one below. Even smiling at the odd little things that can happen day-to-day in the pharmacy can help lighten your mood and attitude.

Top 10 Quotes You’ll Never Hear in a Pharmacy

10. “Sure I can wait a half hour, I can see how busy you are.”
9. “No, Humira® doesn’t require a prior authorization on your prescription plan.”
8. “I’m in the donut hole; I love to pay my fair share.”
7. “Oh, yes, your doctor called in that prescription as you were leaving the office.”
6. “Here is my new insurance card, my birthday, and my current address.”
5. “I didn’t lose my Vicodin®, I didn’t flush them, my dog didn’t eat them, and my purse wasn’t stolen. I took more than prescribed. I think I’m really addicted.”
4. “A $60 copay is a great value for medication that is that effective.”
3. “I can’t tell the difference between the brand and generic. They are equally effective.”
2. “My Micardis® is $70, so I guess I’ll hold off on my Viagra®, since blood pressure control is more important.”
1. “I always go home and count my pills, and I think your tech gave me five extra. Could I reimburse you?”

If you’d like to speak with your local McKesson pharmacy advisor about clinical opportunities that can help you re-engage in your clinical practice or discuss pharmacy succession planning activities, please check out BetterPharmacyHealth.com or call us at 866.329.0113.

Conclusion

Despite the last recommendation, there’s nothing funny about burnout. The challenges of running a store can leave even the most dedicated pharmacist feeling frustrated and underappreciated. You may find it hard to remember why you became a pharmacist — not to mention the powerful, lasting impact you have on patients every day. When these tough moments seem to be happening more frequently, look to the suggestions in this guide. Think about your current level of strain and which of the tips presented can help you enjoy your job as a pharmacist again.

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9. FreeCE.com, PharmCon. Kreckel, DK., Kreckel, PA.