



# INDIAN FERTILITY SOCIETY

## SIG Newsletter

May 2025

### Holistic Medicine



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### Stress, Burnout Among Doctors

**Rajvi H Mehta PhD, SIG Holistic Medicine, IFS, Academic Consultant, CooperSurgicals**

Medical doctors, clinicians are constantly working towards the health of their patients trying to treat their symptoms, the root cause of their symptoms and to take preventive measures against diseases. In fact, from the time of their residency, they work long hours, multiple nights on their commitment towards patient health.

But, what about their own health and the impact of the stress that they experience on their personal and professional life. This topic is rarely discussed.

Unfortunately, in the last few years, the doctors who were once referred to as “Gods” have become a target of litigation and even assault. Whenever such an incident occurs - there is a hue and cry - and after few days, things get back to normal. The high costs of education, the heavy workloads in public hospitals, the high expectation from patients do create professional stress. Stress, be it physical, mental, emotional or financial is bound to affect one's health and performance. So, as part of the SIG on Holistic Medicine, we take upon ourselves to discuss this topic on professional stress.

### **Prevalence of physicians burnout and depression:**

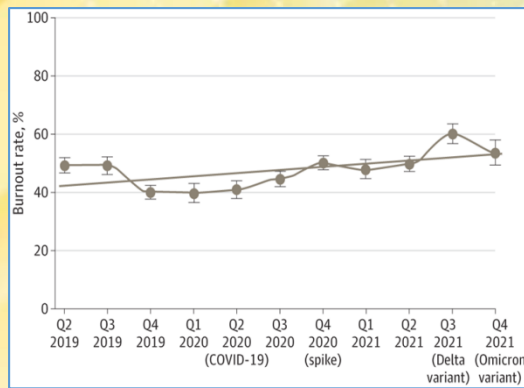
In 2022, Medscape did a survey on stress, anxiety, anger, depression and burnout among physicians. They got responses from 13000 physicians across 29 specialties. The most burnout speciality was emergency medicine and critical care with 60% and 56% experiencing burnout. What was surprising that the Obstetrician and gynaecologists were the third most burnout speciality 53% experiencing burnout.

### **What is burnout?**

Burnout is defined as a reaction to prolonged stress that may include emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a lack of satisfaction from work. Burnout manifests itself emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, loss of personal accomplishment along with physical exhaustion. Any individual, leave alone a doctor, cannot be expected to perform to the best of her abilities when they are burned out. It can lead to an error of judgement, flawed decision making and even errors in procedures. Unlike any other profession, such errors can even turn fatal.

The survey by Medscape referred to earlier was done during the pandemic and one would anticipate burnout among doctors during those demanding time. However, the survey showed that burnout rates were high pre-pandemic too and there was no rise during the pandemic and the number of doctors who responded was as high as 20,665/-1 in 5 of the 9300 physicians were considering leaving the profession.

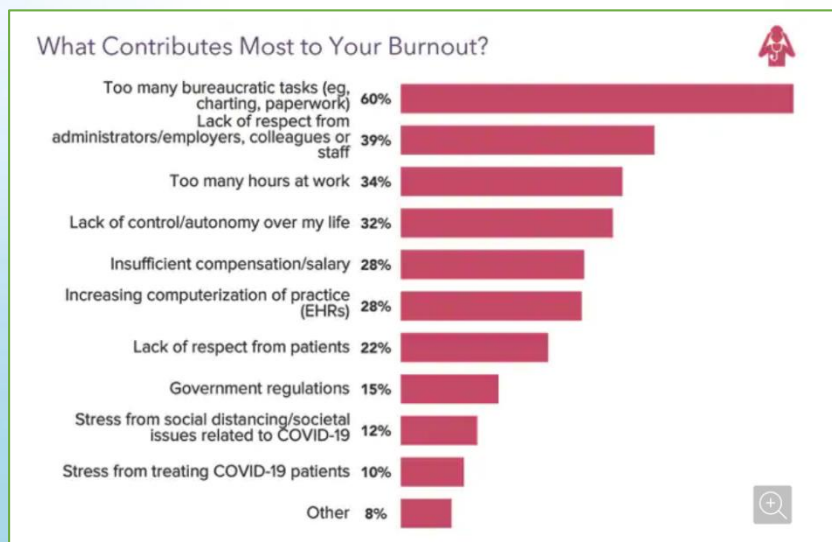




Every profession accepts a margin of failure. To prevent failures, standard operating procedures are developed, back-up plans are created to reduce the impact of “failures”. However, the fear of failure itself can become a stressor it self!

### The causes of burnout

The next question was to find out what stresses the doctors the most. Whether it was long interactions with the patients and their problems; the long physically and mentally demanding procedures; counseling of patients when things don’t go as expected or desired by the patients, administrative work or just handling staff. The results were surprising.



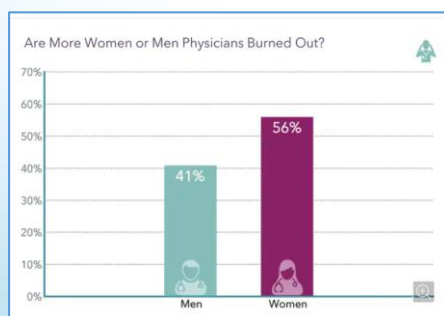
It clearly shows that medical professionals are better geared to handle the stress of patients, procedures – it is something that they are well trained and probably like to do. But, what causes burnout is the administrative and paper work. And, the lack of respect from the administrators and staff!

This is indeed a red-flag for those involved in health care, especially the corporate world. The heart and soul of healthcare industry is the medical doctor. I do not intend to belittle the support of the entire staff from the paramedics, to embryologists in IVF, nurses, administrators and the large team of supporting staff. But, if the clinician does not exist then nobody else does! And, if the clinician is “burned out” then the entire team and the patient will be affected. And the cause of burnout appears to be more to do with non-medical reasons!

### Other chronic stressors

**Eating habits:** The eating habits often take a toll. One eats at odd hours, sometimes one may need to skip a meal. Over the long run - this can influence one's health. Coffee often becomes a saviour . . .

**Work-life balance:** As a medical professional, work life balance can be affected. There may be times where one would prefer to be at home because of ailing parents or a sick toddler. But, professional commitments may not permit it. This possibly explains why more women than men experience burnout as they do play a bigger traditional role in the family.



### Postures and pain:

Occupational positions and posture also contribute to pain and stress. To expect one to function with chronic pain, even “killing” it transiently with drugs takes a toll on the professional. There are several studies which report on pain in various health care professionals. Common pains experienced being:

1. Arm and neck pain in ultrasonographers
2. Neck and upper back pain in eye care professionals
3. Musculoskeletal discomfort in cytogeneticists
4. Neck Pain among pathologists

5. Back and neck pain has also been reported in clinical embryologists



Even with the best ergonomical furniture, long hours at the microscope does take a toll on the trapezium muscles leading to neck and shoulder pain.

### **Coping mechanisms**

The best way to prevent burnout is to take a break. It can be a long break or short one doing things which one likes. Although, one gets busy with work, it is important to take some time off for oneself. Often hobbies take a back-seat in medical school and disappear during mid-life in the interest of time. But, hobbies would help one to relax faster. Exercise, music, yoga, just being with nature “burn” stress.

While doctors aim to remove distress from the lives of their patients, they too need time to de-stress their own selves.





# INDIAN FERTILITY SOCIETY

## How to Become an IFS Member



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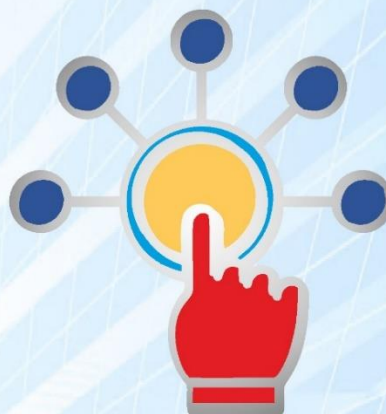


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SIG

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**Dr (Prof) Shweta Mittal Gupta**  
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