

## Burnout among Doctors during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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There are situations when a doctor is overwhelmed by the sheer number of patients he has to deal with viz. following natural or man-made disasters, accidents or war. Fortunately, most of these occur at one time or over a short period. Though wars may last longer, their intensity and the consequent casualties usually wax and wane. Pandemics however are different; there is a spate of patients who are critically ill and this continues for months on end without let up. Doing duties under severe stress for prolonged periods is going to take its toll on the mental health of doctors, Manifesting with depletion of affective reserves, a sense of unreality along with a negative evaluation of one's expertise as a specialist. This abnormal mental state was described as "Burnout" by Freudenberger and subsequently by Maslach [1,2]. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, doctors are finding themselves in combat with a new virus about which very little is known and the management of the disorder is being learnt on the job. Almost every day contradictory evaluations of various treatment regimens are published, which adds to the stress.

High prevalence of burnout in Doctors negatively affects patient care [3]. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies had reported that the prevalence of psychological distress, depression, and burnout were significantly higher in resident physicians compared to the general working population in USA. In India also high burnout was reported in a study of 482 doctors even prior to the current pandemic [4]. The COVID 19 pandemic has manifested with few unique features like lack of knowledge about infectivity of the novel Corona virus and chances of the doctor passing the infection to their loved ones. This coupled with the accompanying infodemic, excessive work load and adverse work conditions e.g. working with personal protective gear, are all increasing the stress.

In the present hospital setup, the backbone of the treatment team are the resident doctors who are at the forefront of providing care. They are also under stress as along with their professional duties they are also required to read and assimilate vast amount of specialised knowledge pertaining to their speciality. The advent of the COVID -19 pandemic has been extremely stressful to this vulnerable group. Apart from increased work load, their leave has been curtailed and from many centres there are complaints of less access to personal protective equipment may have caused this unfavourable state [5]. In fact many of them have already suffered from COVID-19. In this depressing scenario, a surprising bit of good news is that a recent study assessed that burnout frequency was lower in frontline staff. The reasons for this are not exactly known. This could be due to the fact that a feeling of control over their work situation is associated with lower prevalence of burnout. Probably doctors in COVID-19 wards have a feeling of greater control over their ward, while those working in their usual place of work have to follow well established practices that have been developed over time for the safety and well-being of patients and staff [6]. Resilience, the active method of managing and adapting to adversity, is the key to remove burnout [7,8]. An encouraging and accommodating work atmosphere along with making provision for adequate rest is essential for maintaining the resilience of doctors fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

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