

Five Ways to Cultivate Resilience

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Resilience is a powerful weapon against burnout.

By now, you've probably heard the statistic: More than 60 percent of family physicians meet the criteria for burnout.¹ Many of the changes needed to combat this problem are beyond the individual physician's control, but there is something each of us can do. We can cultivate resilience.

Resilience is our capacity to quickly recover from and cope with adverse circumstances and to view them as opportunities to become stronger. Family physician Maria Colon-Gonzales, MD, often says resilience is like a weapon for battling burnout; it can be extremely powerful, on offense or defense.

To cultivate resilience and gain internal power, five habits can help:

1. Focus on what matters. When our days are filled with frustrations or tasks that have no meaning, burnout is likely. So ask yourself, "What activities or roles are most important to me?" Make a list. Then, each week, plan what you want to accomplish — and say "no" to other activities or people — so you can spend more time on things that matter. Aligning your mission and values and finding your *ikigai*, or "reason for being," can also help clarify where you should spend your time.

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2. Renew your energy. You won't be able to face the challenges of practice, or life, if you feel depleted. Think about what energizes you, and incorporate those activities into your day. Even small things can make a difference. For example, take mental or physical breaks during the day. Read a book you enjoy. Listen to music. Exercise. Keep a gratitude journal. Practice mindfulness using a smartphone app like <http://www.mindfulness-dailyapp.com>. Or keep a collection of inspirational or humorous quotes in your office.

3. Connect with others. In the highs and lows of life, we all need a support system. Unfortunately, some physicians neglect their relationships for so long that, when a crisis hits, they feel alone. Take time each week to be with family and friends without the distraction of electronics. Spend some non-work time with your colleagues as well, such as lunch away from your computers. Seek out a mentor who can help you grow professionally, or join a book club or the Physician Health and Wellbeing Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/171970293460123/>). Connecting with like-minded physicians at conferences can also help restore your joy in medicine.

4. Practice self-regulation and self-compassion. Stress can have deleterious effects on your well-being. To better manage stress, practice self-regulation by being aware of your feelings and choosing how you respond. In medicine, we tend to add to our stress by being our own harshest critics. Learn to be kind to yourself, and

RESOURCES

Family Physician Health and Well-Being Conference: <https://www.aafp.org/events/fpwb-conf.html>.

Living on Borrowed Time (a time management exercise). Moskowitz PS. *Fam Pract Manag*. 2001;8(2):66. <https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2001/0200/p66.html>.

Physician Health First: <https://www.aafp.org/membership/benefits/physician-health-first.html>.

Physician Resilience: What It Means, Why It Matters, and How to Promote It. Epstein RM, Krasner MS. *Acad Med*. 2013;88(3):301-303.

make sure your inner voice tells you the truth about who you are.

5. Speak out. If you feel anxious, depressed, marginalized, abused, etc., tell someone. There is no shame in seeking help. At the same time, speak out when you see others who are suffering and need an advocate. By caring for each other, we ensure the family of family medicine remains strong and well.

Building resilience may seem like a "soft" skill, but it is vital. Investing in your own wellness will help reduce your risk of burnout and lead to a happier, more effective career — and life. **FPM**

1. Shanafelt TD, Hasan O, Dyrbye LN, et al. Changes in burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance in physicians and the general U.S. working population between 2011 and 2014. *Mayo Clinic Proc*. 2015;90(12):1600-1613.

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