First Choice Health™

Healthy Employees. Healthy Companies.™

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# Physician Assistance Program

Spring 2007

## What People Are Saying About First Choice Health

*"I spoke to an understanding representative who promptly referred me to a counselor. I am extremely satisfied. This program is a great resource."*

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*"The customer service person was kind and a great listener. I was nervous and she made me comfortable and glad I called. Thanks for a wonderful service!"*

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*"Thank you for the excellent customer service. Having access played a major role in keeping me at my job and rebuilding confidence. You do great work!"*

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*"My wife and I are very pleased with the process and the results of our counseling."*

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*"I was so impressed with the counseling professional. Within one day of calling I had an appointment scheduled. I highly recommend this service!"*

## What's In Your Spring Newsletter?

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Burnout Assessment

## Are you Shining Bright or Burning Out?

Do you start your days with a sense of tension rather than pleasure? Do you sometimes struggle with yourself to get to work. Do you feel you'll probably disappoint someone—at home, at work, or probably in both places? If you are feeling overwhelmed and can't get out of bed in the morning or you have trouble separating yourself from the office at night, you may need a different job. But more likely, you may be suffering from burnout. Because burnout doesn't happen overnight — and it's difficult to fight once you're in the middle of it — it's important to recognize the early signs of burnout and head it off. Burnout usually has its roots in stress, so the earlier you recognize the symptoms of stress and address them, the better chance you have of avoiding burnout.

**If you're feeling chronically overwhelmed check these symptoms for burnout. The signs of burnout tend to be more mental than physical. They can include feelings of:**

- Frustration and powerlessness
- Hopelessness
- Being drained of emotional energy
- Detachment, withdrawal, isolation
- Being trapped
- Never feeling like you have done enough
- Irritability
- Sadness
- Cynicism (people act out of selfishness and nothing can be done about it)

### Preventing physician burnout

When it comes to physician burnout, the stakes are high, as burned-out physicians have the potential to endanger people they care about. And physicians are under tremendous pressure to "do it all," when it comes to solving other people's problems. So the first strategy for preventing burnout as a physician is, don't try to do it all alone. Cut yourself some slack, try these tips:

### List your priorities, then do what's important first

When we interview a physician that is potentially suffering from burnout, we ask him to list his responsibilities in order of importance. A typical list: serving on a hospital committee, doing charts, ordering supplies, and seeing patients. Thinking our request is unclear, we reply, "But what's most important on your list?" The response we typically hear: "It's all important!"

No, it's not. As a practicing physician, you have only three top priorities: You need to see patients. You need to do charts. And you need to prevent yourself from wearing out so that you can keep seeing patients and doing charts.

A physician who treats 15 patients a day could be working just as hard as one who sees 25. What is the difference? The doctor with the high numbers knows how to set priorities. The doctor with the low number generally tries to do it all. Yet in the end, he's less productive and becomes overwhelmed.

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# Are you Shining Bright or Burning Out?

### Don't be a hostage to other people's schedules

Prioritize your patient appointments. Not every patient must be seen today you must set the boundaries for your schedule. Give your receptionist instructions on which types of patients should receive priority. When people call for non-routine appointments that your receptionist isn't sure when to schedule, ask yourself, "Who's seriously ill? Who can wait a day or a week?" Schedule time in your day for breaks and lunch.

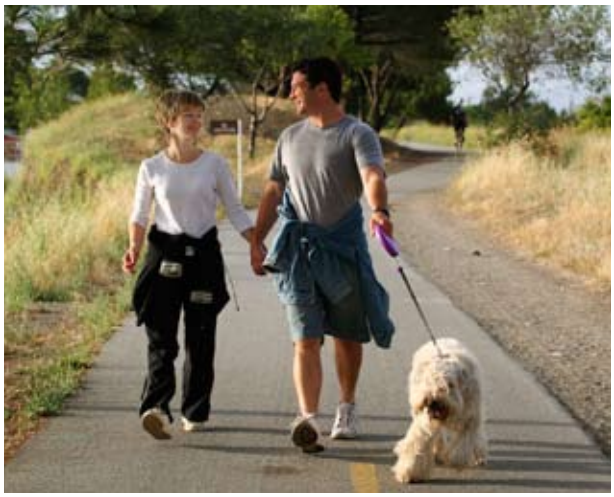
Schedule meetings with suppliers, pharmaceutical salespeople, and other non-patients at your convenience, not theirs. Then set strict limits for the meeting: "I can give you 10 minutes next Thursday at noon. But at 12:10, I will need to go." And then stick to the schedule.

### Identify your personal time, don't do charts after hours

Many physicians try to maximize the number of patients they see by saving all chart writing until after the last patient has left. That's an invitation to burnout. Even if it means seeing fewer patients, get charts done before your scheduled workday ends. If you find this impossible, contact your specialty society, and ask about a continuing medical education course in efficient chart writing or look into dictation.

By keeping your evenings free to recharge your batteries, you'll reduce stress.

Use after work time to nurture your closest relationships, such as those with your partner, children or friends. These relationships can help restore energy and alleviate some of the psychological effects of burnout, such as feelings of being underappreciated. Try to put aside what's burning you out and make the time you spend with loved ones positive and enjoyable.



### Do something to recharge your interest

I have met many physicians who have become terminally complacent. Internists may be sick of performing lumps-and-bump medicine day after day, cardiologists swear that if they monitor one more treadmill test, they'll go insane. Psychiatrists cringe at having to hear patients gripe about the raw deals they got as kids. These problems are not the fault of the patient it's our perspective that has become ill.

The antidote isn't necessarily a new job. In two or three years, any job will become routine. First, try making the position you already have more interesting. An internist who wants a more stimulating job might consider concentrating on hospital work. A Family Practitioner who loves computers can become the group's technology guru. Take a CME course to learn a new skill. Challenge yourself, and the boring parts of your job will be easier to bear. You might try reviving your passion for why you chose medicine by volunteering for a week of service. I have seen countless physicians re-discover passion by giving away the gift of healing to those who could not afford to pay for it.

### Identify stressful events, be strategic about your work

Most people think in broad categories: my job is to blame for my burnout. If this were true, everyone who does the same type of work as you would be burned out. Think about your job strategically. If you can't meet your daily patient quota or your on-call schedule is overly difficult – ask for the position to be restructured so that it's less stressful. Your employer has every reason to work with you. Replacing a good doctor is expensive, and physician burnout can lead to clinical errors, greater malpractice risks, high absenteeism, poor rapport with patients, and low morale. Be realistic about how much of your time and yourself you can give, set limits, and communicate those limits to doctors, family members, and other people involved. But think and be realistic before you reduce your responsibilities. Many physicians are dismayed to find their compensation proportionately reduced to a reduction in workload. If you want to work fewer hours, expect to take a financial hit.

### Be strategic about support and blow off steam

Talk to people about what you feel; don't keep your emotions bottled up. Where does your support come from? If you cannot readily answer this you will need to be strategic about building a system of support. Trusted friends and family members can help. Choose a confidant from your colleagues with whom you can share feelings comfortably and open up to him or her. It's not advice you're seeking so much as the opportunity to blow off steam and hear yourself talk before a willing audience. Giving voice to pent-up emotions can lower stress and the risk of burnout.

If none of your colleagues is a likely candidate for support, consider psychotherapy or a support group. It's a chance to vent your frustrations to an objective listener whose only agenda is to help you cope with problems like burnout.

### Make exercise a priority

Exercise is an effective prescription for preventing burnout. Candidates for burnout tend to be out of shape. Taking time for yourself and exercising is incompatible with burnout. You might start by buying yourself exercise clothes and shoes you like, join a gym, hire a personal trainer or simply start with brisk walks. Prioritizing exercise into your schedule by incorporating some sort of regular physical activity will help you fell better, be mellower, and have more energy. That's how to keep from burning out.

# World-Class People, Tools & Resources

The First Choice Health PAP Customer Service Team is here to meet your needs and surpass your expectations – 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Contact the PAP at any time – whenever the need arises.

In addition to the online Work/Life Resources mentioned in this newsletter, remember that at www.FirstChoiceDoc.com you can take advantage of a variety of effectiveness-enhancing tools, trainings and resources. Online Conference allows you or your loved ones to consult in real time with a licensed professional counselor from the comfort of home (or from any internet-ready personal computer). Our secure messaging software makes it convenient and possible to benefit from the expertise of the PAP from anywhere you can connect to the Internet. The PAP also offers self-awareness enhancing Screening Tools for Assertiveness, Stress, Anxiety, and Depression. The Screening Tools are not diagnostic in nature, but instead offer you or your loved ones the opportunity to assess the potential for vulnerability to the conflicts and demands of modern life.

If privacy is an issue in your work setting, you can request a counseling assessment referral or other PAP services from our Web site by clicking on the Schedule an Appointment button. It's fast, convenient and private.

All of us at Team PAP at First Choice Health feel privileged to be of service to you and your immediate loved ones. We're here to help! Contact us at any time of night or day by calling (800) 777-1323 or pointing your browser to www.FirstChoiceDoc.com.

## Most Frequent Requests for PAP Services

Every day, employee families across the country contact First Choice Health by phone, email and the Internet for creative, healthy solutions to the conflicts and demands of modern living. We thought it would be helpful to share the most frequently expressed concerns, distractions (and opportunities for change) that clients trust Team PAP to respond to.

- Marital and Relationship Challenges and Changes
- Family Disruptions and Poor Communication
- Finding Healthier Ways of Dealing with Stress
- Symptoms of Sadness, Anxiety & Depression
- Responding Effectively to Children & Teens
- Life Transitions (Grief & Loss)
- Healthy Ways of Dealing with Difficult People
- Increasing Self-Confidence & Getting Unstuck
- Compulsive Behaviors (Shopping, Gambling, Drug & Alcohol Abuse)
- Eldercare, Legal Consultation and Other Work/Life Resources

PAP services are cost-free, confidential, matched to meet your needs, and available in a location convenient to where you live or work. You can connect to our robust network of experienced counseling and work/life professionals twenty-four hours per day.

# Burnout Assessment

Most people have an intuitive idea of what burnout is. From the research perspective, burnout is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively. These negative feelings usually have a gradual onset. They can reflect the feeling that your efforts make no difference, or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non-supportive work environment. Higher scores on this scale mean that you are at higher risk for burnout.

**0=Never 1=Rarely 2= Occasionally 3=Somewhat Often 4=Often 5=Very Often**

1. ____ I am unhappy.
2. ____ I do not feel connected to others.
3. ____ I am losing sleep over traumatic experiences of a person I help.
4. ____ I feel trapped by my work as a helper.
5. ____ I do not have beliefs that sustain me.
6. ____ I am not the person I always wanted to be.
7. ____ Because of my work as a helper, I feel exhausted.
8. ____ I feel overwhelmed by the amount of work or the size of my case (work) load I have to deal with.
9. ____ I feel "bogged down" by the system.
10. ____ I am not a very sensitive person.

**Total Score _____**

**Risk of Burnout**
**Low – Score 18 and lower**
**Moderate – 19 to 26**
**High – 27 and above**

The average score on the burnout scale is 22 (SD 6.0; alpha scale reliability .72). About 25% of people score above 27 and about 25% of people score below 18. If your score is below 18, this probably reflects positive feelings about your ability to be effective in your work. If you score above 27 you may wish to think about what at work makes you feel like you are not effective in your position. Your score may reflect your mood; perhaps you were having a "bad day" or are in need of some time off. If the high score persists or if it is reflective of other worries, it may be a cause for concern.

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# The New First Choice Health

Market research has acknowledged First Choice Health's reputation for providing superior products and services supported by reliable and responsive customer support. This is the identity of First Choice Health.

The new logo and tagline have been developed to more effectively communicate our mission, vision, and values.

Our core services facilitate healthy employees. The return on investment (ROI) is a healthy company.

*Americans are living longer than ever. Our average life expectancy has increased to 77.9 years—up from 59.7 in 1930. But recent studies show that it is the quality of those additional years that matter to us most. Contact your PAP for ideas and resources for self-care and wellness.*