

Treating healthcare worker burnout: Practical insights for boosting morale and engagement



Anyone in healthcare doesn't have to be told that it's a challenging time. With too many patients and insufficient resources, it's no surprise that healthcare worker burnout is happening on an unprecedented level. The good news is that there are some practical ways to turn down the volume of burnout by taking an organizational approach to improving [morale and engagement](#) among healthcare workers.

Burnout in healthcare workers is rooted in the convergence of several factors: reduced government funding to pay for critical resources, an aging population, and an insufficient supply of healthcare workers. It's no wonder that [76% of healthcare workers](#) report feeling burnout—and these burnout factors will not abate anytime soon.



On the verge of conflict

Naturally, these stressors cause conflict in the workplace. Hospitals need faster reimbursements, which pits administrators against healthcare workers to fill out paperwork more quickly. It's one reason a [Medscape study](#) found that "too many bureaucratic tasks" was the top reason for physician burnout.

At the same time, greater demand for healthcare results in long waits and shorter visits, putting frontline healthcare in a position where they're playing catch-up constantly. This pits physicians against nurses and office workers in a race to cycle through as many patients as possible. And patients often get lost in the shuffle, which may explain why an [Ipsos survey](#) found that 43% of American patients today are unhappy with their healthcare systems.

With all of these pressures working against them, it's not surprising that morale and engagement are low; the second-most cited reason from that Medscape study was "lack of respect from co-workers."

Moral injuries can be mortal injuries for healthcare careers

Time and resource limitations have caused many healthcare workers to question whether what they're doing today still aligns with the reason they chose the profession to begin with:

- Are they providing a satisfactory standard of care?
- Are they delivering equitable treatment to all patients?
- How have financial motives affected their ability to do their jobs?

These moral injuries—slow but steady deviations away from their sense of purpose—can significantly affect morale and engagement. If people no longer feel that they're fulfilling the goal of helping people first and foremost, healthcare worker burnout is a near-certain byproduct.

Considering that [38% of respondents](#) in a recent Arbinger survey reported that “meaningful work” is a key factor in their job satisfaction, it's clear that these feelings of separation from purpose are impacting healthcare workers in a big way.

How one hospital handled healthcare worker burnout

As described earlier, it's natural for healthcare worker burnout to cause workers to see patients as participants in a numbers game rather than humans. However, one hospital realized that they needed to make a change.

Without a mindset that puts other people first—patients, coworkers, etc.—it's hard for burnt-out healthcare workers to

[see the humanity](#) in what they do, leading to both patient dissatisfaction and burnout. Conversely, helping them regain a mindset that recognizes the impact of their work on others helps to improve both job satisfaction and quality of care.

Regions Hospital in St Paul, MN, was overwhelmed with patients and work, making it difficult for some of their staff to focus on individual patients and their needs, and patient engagement survey results demonstrated that this mindset—get the work done first and foremost—had a negative impact on patients' perceptions of their care.

They knew that performing care efficiently and processing claims quickly was still important, but they also recognized the need to take an organization-wide approach to refocusing their workers' mindsets on the needs of patients first, even in the context of their packed schedules. As a result of [mindset-focused training](#), workers started collaborating more to help each other, increasing efficiency, and their patients, increasing quality of care.

As a result, engagement scores improved across the board because both the speed and quality of care improved—and patients felt like they were being treated as people rather than obstacles in someone's workday.

Watch their story about how they turned around healthcare worker burnout at Regions Hospital here:

The role of mindset in morale and engagement

Mindset plays a key role in how people treat each other, and yet it's easy to ignore the humanity of coworkers and patients when you're under stress. It's critical but challenging to remember that the people around you deserve the same respect and dignity with which you hope to be treated. This is especially true in a healthcare setting, when patients may need that human touch to allay their concerns.

When healthcare workers develop a mindset to help others over themselves, many changes occur that increase the speed and quality of care. For example:

- A nurse checking on an alarm for a patient isn't her responsibility; knowing that team coverage of alarms can help ensure patient safety.
- A physician recognizes that a nurse who corrected his mistake was helping a patient rather than challenging his authority.
- An administrator works with physicians to identify opportunities to reduce unnecessary paperwork, giving them more time with patients while improving workflow.

Research has shown that treating patients with dignity, understanding, and optimism [results in better outcomes](#).

Think of this approach to mindset and then reconsider the factors that lead to poor morale and engagement. With a concerted effort toward mindset shift, organizations can help healthcare workers refocus their efforts on patient care, cooperation, and collaboration. Putting mindset first diminishes the stressors that lower morale and reinforces the sense of purpose that drove people to healthcare careers to begin with.

By fostering a work environment where people want to help each other and their patients, organizations can reduce healthcare worker burnout and moral injury. That change—and the improvements in productivity, attrition rates, and patient satisfaction that accompany it—is only possible with an organizational commitment to [a shift in mindset](#).

Learn more about how you can transform the dynamics at your healthcare organization and make the necessary changes to reduce burnout and boost employee morale [here](#).