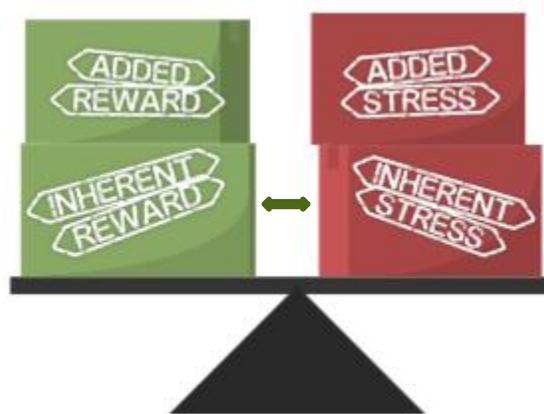


Founding Executive Council Insights Clinician Burnout: Amplifying Rewards and Mitigating Stress

Overview

The day-to-day lives of clinicians are a steady stream of stressors and rewards. When stressors are allowed to compound unmitigated, it takes a toll on clinicians' wellness, leaving them emotionally exhausted, cynical, and struggling to find a sense of meaning and personal accomplishment in their calling. Burnout affects over half of U.S. physicians and is also highly prevalent among the nursing workforce, posing a significant threat to safe, high-quality patient care (Dyrbye et al., 2017).

Press Ganey recently introduced a new framework to deconstruct the sources of the various stress and rewards that clinicians face. The framework categorizes stressors and rewards into those that are inherent to being a caregiver, and those that are external to the work environment. Further it contextualizes the outcomes of engagement or burnout in terms of the balance of stress and reward experienced by the individual clinician.



Inherent stressors and rewards are inevitably interconnected because of what it means to be a caregiver. Indeed, the inherent rewards embedded in the role of healing and the opportunity to save a life are often what draw individuals to the healthcare profession. At the same time, patient care is physically, intellectually, and emotionally demanding.

When contemplating how to reduce clinician burnout, organizational leaders must realize that—though they cannot eliminate inherent stressors—they can prioritize strategies that reduce the impact of inherent stressors and help clinicians cope with the difficult work of patient care. Additionally, leaders must create a culture that amplifies and reinforces the inherent rewards of the healing professions.

The framework also recognizes that the health care environment itself adds both stress and rewards that are separate from those associated with caring for patients. These external stressors include the necessary burden of documentation (e.g., collecting data for payment processing and quality tracking), working with inefficient electronic health record (EHR) systems, and coping with suboptimal staffing levels.

Although external rewards—such as good pay and benefits, or the privileges of seniority—are desirable, they do little to ameliorate the burden of experienced stress.

In an effort to address burnout, some health care organizations erroneously convey the notion that resilience is the responsibility of the individual clinician (Shanafelt & Noseworthy, 2017). Because burnout is associated with serious risks to both patients and clinicians, it is a health system problem that requires organization-directed, evidence-based interventions (Panagioti et al., 2017). To that end, health care leaders must understand and address the distinct sources of stress and reward associated with clinician burnout.

The Institute for Innovation's Founding Executive Council convened at Press Ganey's 2017 National Client Conference to share their thoughts about clinician burnout. They also discussed their organizations' efforts to enhance clinicians' personal fulfillment by mitigating inherent stress, reducing external stress, and amplifying inherent and external rewards. We are pleased to summarize these insights.

Brigham and Women's Hospital

Amplifying Inherent Rewards

Organizational leaders spend a lot of time talking about what clinicians as individuals need to do to become more resilient, rather than what the organization needs to do to amplify the inherent rewards of patient care. Self-compassion is important from a personal resilience standpoint, but two other major drivers—values alignment and perceived appreciation—can be influenced by the organization.

For instance, patient experience can be viewed as a stressor by clinicians at times, as one more thing that they need to do. Organizational leaders have a real opportunity to simplify the message around patient experience so that it doesn't become something clinicians feel defensive about or overwhelmed by. Attending to patient experience is a meaningful endeavor that aligns with the values of the organization, and also amplifies the inherent rewards of being a clinician.

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Dr. Jessica Dudley, Chief Medical Officer at Brigham and Women's Hospital, believes that the current cultural norm in health care is that clinicians must be tough, work hard, and sacrifice themselves in order to excel at patient care. This perception should give pause to organizational leaders. Leaders can help mitigate some of the inherent stress of being a caregiver by setting the tone that, culturally, this is not okay. Clinicians should be encouraged to prioritize self-care. It should not be viewed as a sign of weakness to seek support for depression, anxiety, or other issues.

Carolinas HealthCare System

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Connie Bonebrake, Senior Vice President and Chief Experience Officer at Carolinas HealthCare System, shared their grassroots effort to develop Compassion Champions within the organization to mitigate inherent stresses. It started modestly in Carolinas' spiritual care department and has grown to over 1,800 Compassion Champions today.

Teammates, including physicians, can sign up to become Compassion Champions by committing to acting compassionately at three levels:

- **Level 1:** I am being compassionate to myself.
- **Level 2:** I am being compassionate to my team.
- **Level 3:** I am spreading compassion beyond my team.

Carolinas' Code Lavender program—designed to provide clinicians with rapid response emotional support after a traumatic event—is supported by the organization's Compassion Champions. Carolinas' flagship hospital averages eight Code Lavenders per day (e.g., for patient deaths, violence toward an employee, a feeling of being unsafe), making Compassion Champions an essential part of mitigating inherent caregiver stress.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

Another culture-building effort at Carolinas has the potential to spread the message of compassion even further throughout the organization. Carolinas' CEO recently launched an effort called Team Teal (Carolinas' corporate color) in which every hospital department was asked to select a non-leadership individual to serve as an informal organizational leader. Team Teal members are highly connected to—

and highly regarded by—Carolinas' executive leaders and are trained to deliver important corporate messaging to peers. In the future, Team Teal members may be trained to share the message that compassion is an organizational priority, and that all employees should seek opportunities for compassion toward themselves, their team, and others.

Carolinas underscores the importance of compassion as an organizational value by amplifying the external rewards associated with compassionate behavior. The employee wellness program, Live Well, allows employees to earn points for wellness activities such as smoking cessation, exercising, and acting with compassion. Employees receive points that can be applied to their health savings accounts, or redeemed for other rewards, after they complete and document six activities related to self-compassion or compassion toward others.

Emory Healthcare

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Redge Hanna, Corporate Director, Service Performance at Emory Healthcare, described how the organization helps mitigate the inherent stress associated with traumatic events through spiritual cleansing ceremonies. For example, Emory recently experienced a traumatic event involving the death of a young mother in the OR. Some of the OR care team members were having difficulty going back into the OR after the incident.

A spiritual cleansing ceremony was held in which the care team came together in the OR. Once convened, sage was burned in the room as a way to transform the site of the traumatic event back into a space of healing. Although the idea was not embraced by all clinicians at first, Emory's Chief Medical Officer supported the ceremony as a unique way to acknowledge the trauma of the event, and symbolize the care team's move forward to continue their mission of healing.

Reducing External Stress

While traumatic events are a source of inherent stress, disruptive clinician conduct can be a source of external stress. The [Emory Healthcare Pledge](#) is a set of actions and behaviors physicians and staff use to hold themselves accountable for creating a collegial and respectful workplace atmosphere. The pledge helps to minimize the tendency to overlook disrespectful behavior when, for example, a physician has highly valued clinical skills.

Two other initiatives recently implemented at Emory are simple, but will hopefully have an impact on the external stress associated with meeting attendance. First, all meetings at Emory are now required to end ten minutes before the hour to give people more time to get to their next meeting, use the restroom, or check email. The organization is investigating hard-coding this restriction into Outlook.

Additionally, no meetings may start before 10:00 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The intention behind this effort is to free more time for leaders to connect with staff through daily huddles where they can address staff stress, celebrate wins, and help build a cohesive team.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

As part of physician coaching at Emory, physicians are asked for three words that capture how they would like to be described by their colleagues and patients. The technique helps physicians to articulate, in essence, a personal code of conduct that they want to own. Many physicians prefer to represent

themselves in admirable ways that reflect the qualities they want to be known for, rather than be “shoe-horned” into a code of conduct.

Hawaii Pacific Health

Reducing External Stress

Dr. Dale Glenn, Chief of Family Medicine at Hawaii Pacific Health’s Straub Clinic & Hospital, described a program that mitigates external stresses by targeting redundancies, inefficiencies, and unnecessary work. The organization’s Getting Rid of Stupid Stuff (GROSS) program encourages staff to submit suggestions for processes that should be removed because they have no clinical, safety, financial, or emotional value for patients or clinicians. Suggestions have included eliminating duplicate patient forms and revisiting the data employees have to enter to ensure it is being entered for an identified purpose.

Henry Ford Health System

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Dr. Rana Awdish, Director, Pulmonary Hypertension Program and Medical Director, Care Experience at Henry Ford Health System, shared that physicians can self-select to participate in a palliative care book club to discuss issues related to compassion fatigue and the inherent stresses of being a caregiver.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

Henry Ford has also established a Physician Communication and Peer Support department to provide structure to the organization’s inherent and external stress reduction efforts, which allows physicians to determine what support components they want to avail themselves of based upon their needs.

Mayo Clinic Health System

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Dr. Thomas Howell, Medical Director, Patient Experience at Mayo Clinic Health System, discussed how being part of a care team that relies on each other for emotional support can mitigate inherent stress. For instance, a Labor and Delivery event occurred at Mayo in which a newborn was harmed. Many staff members—including physicians, nurses, and laboratory staff—were deeply affected by the traumatic event and came together to debrief.

Initially, the discussion centered exclusively on the root cause analysis. It wasn’t until a physician spoke up to say how emotionally difficult the situation was for him, and how he felt he had let the team down, that other staff began to open up. They said that they appreciated the physician’s candor as it gave them permission to share their own feelings.

Reducing External Stress

Mayo organizational leaders understand that external stress cannot be addressed simply through increasing external rewards. No amount of money can improve the emotional state of a burned-out clinician. In fact, an increase in external rewards without addressing the source of the stress itself may reduce or negate the inherent reward felt from being a caregiver.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

Meaningful patient relationships are among the inherent rewards being a clinician. Unfortunately, patient experience is often perceived by clinicians as a source of added stress. This may be, in part, because patient experience is approached by organizations as a problem to be solved, rather than as a way to

build resilience. Leaders invest too much time debating the data with clinicians instead of starting the conversation with, “We want to share some of the perceptions that your patients have of your interactions with them. We want those interactions to go as well as possible so that you get credit for being the excellent physician that you are.”

Mount Sinai Health System **Mitigating Inherent Stress**

Dr. Vicki LoPachin, Chief Medical Officer and Senior Vice President at Mount Sinai Health System, described the ICARE peer-to-peer support program Mount Sinai established for physicians, nurses, residents, and nurse practitioners to mitigate inherent stresses. The program was developed after discovering that about 20% of their clinicians were involved in a patient care event that adversely affected them, but that only a small number of those clinicians actually received follow-up emotional support.

ICARE began in targeted departments where there were a naturally occurring high number of adverse events (e.g., emergency department, intensive care unit). Clinicians were surveyed to identify who they typically went to in the organization for emotional support after an adverse event.

It is notable that the individuals identified were not mental health professionals. Rather, they were from a variety of roles and disciplines including physicians, nurses, and house staff. These individuals possessed a natural skill set that allowed their peers to feel comfortable going to them for help.

Mount Sinai leaders approached the individuals to ask if they would be willing to participate in formal peer support training. The training was designed to help the peer support person identify high-risk behaviors that might require an employee assistance program referral. Training started at one of Mount Sinai’s largest hospitals and has since been implemented throughout the health group.

Mount Sinai has been tracking the number and duration of peer support interventions, and is now in the process of evaluating different ways to determine how effective the program has been. One positive outcome of the program is that it has reduced the stigma associated with reaching out for help.

Northwell Health **Amplifying Inherent Rewards**

Northwell set out to amplify the inherent rewards of being a caregiver by [interviewing 2,000 employees](#) about the value proposition of what it means to work at Northwell. From the responses—which included a healthy dose of humor including, “You need a strong bladder”—evolved the tagline, “We’re made for this.”

The tagline has become a powerful expression of Northwell’s [employee promise](#), and reflects why their employees chose health care as their profession. Below is an excerpt from the [full text](#) of the promise:

From the smallest gesture to life-changing treatment and research, we always act with intent, with heart and with passion to make people’s lives the best possible. It’s not a normal 9 to 5. We’re flexible, hardworking and not afraid to push boundaries to go the extra mile for our colleagues, our patients and their families. We are true to our beliefs and our quest to define the health care industry of tomorrow.

Northwell’s service outreach is another way it strives to reignite employees’ passion for their work and amplify the inherent rewards of being a caregiver. For instance, the organization sent groups of staff to

Houston and to Puerto Rico to assist with hurricane relief efforts. Through social media updates, the organization was able to rally behind their colleagues in the field in real-time. A sense of pride was felt that extended well beyond the group of Northwell staff who participated in the service outreach.

Northwell also saw an opportunity to use relationship-centered communication training as a way to help physicians maximize patient experience as one of the inherent rewards of patient care. Northwell approached 15 physicians to build the eight-hour training curriculum.

Having physicians themselves lead the effort was instrumental in securing buy-in from other physicians. The program took two years to get off the ground—and there were numerous skeptics at first—but the program now has many physician champions.

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Sven Gierlinger, Chief Experience Officer at Northwell Health, described how the organization's culture of caring runs through everything they do, including how they care for employees by mitigating inherent stresses. For instance, the organization implemented Code Lavender to provide clinicians with rapid response emotional support after a traumatic event. Clinicians have widely embraced the program, and Northwell has experienced an increased demand for Code Lavender implementation across its sites.

Scripps Health

Amplifying Inherent Rewards

Dr. Ghazala Sharieff, Senior Director, Patient Experience and Medical Management at Scripps Health, described that, as with other organizations, Scripps physicians have at times viewed patient experience as a stressor rather than as an inherent reward of being a caregiver. Many physicians believed that only disgruntled patients completed surveys, and that physicians were getting unfairly penalized.

It was an “aha” moment for physicians when a system-wide analysis of patient experience data revealed that less than 5% of the Scripps patient population actually choose the lowest response category on their patient experience surveys. This realization encouraged previously skeptical physicians to consider that their patient experience data may provide a window into how to make their relationships with patients even more meaningful.

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Scripps has undertaken efforts to mitigate the inherent stress of being a caregiver with its Physician Critical Incident Support Program. This initiative makes employee assistance program psychologists available to physicians who want to confidentially discuss difficult cases.

Reducing External Stress

The time involved documenting EHRs is a common source of external stress for clinicians. To help reduce stress through improved efficiency, Scripps pairs clinicians who spend more than 700 minutes in Epic over a three-week period with a clinician in their specialty who has lower Epic usage for best-practice sharing.

Scripps has also developed a program to support staff when external stressors arise outside the workplace. For instance, the organization's Employee Work-Life Program provides assistance for issues

such as child day care emergencies so that staff members can feel at ease knowing their family's needs are being met while they are at work.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

Scripps' Excel Together Program recognizes staff who go above and beyond in the workplace by awarding them with points that they can redeem to purchase a variety of rewards.

Sutter Health

Amplifying Inherent Rewards

Sutter is also working to amplify the inherent rewards of being a caregiver by showcasing patient stories that reflect their mission to serve patients and their families. Sutter identifies patient and family stories that highlight the excellent work done by their clinical teams, and then shares those stories with employees during various enterprise-wide events (e.g., Management Symposium, Physician & APC Symposium, Sutter Health Governing Board meetings).

Initially, the organization did encounter a barrier to this effort: Capturing patient stories is a full-time job. To facilitate story collection, Sutter developed an application to assist staff with capturing the stories as they happen. The ease of the application's use, along with Sutter's active social-media engagement, enables the organization to relay compelling stories of compassionate care back to caregivers on a consistent basis.

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Anna Kiger, Chief Nurse Officer at Sutter Health, related how the organization works hard to help clinicians cope with the inherent stress of patient care. In 2016, it invited Dr. Tait Shanafelt to speak on the topic of clinician burnout at the annual Physician & Advanced Practice Clinicians (APC) Symposium. They used the opportunity to define burnout and discuss how the organization could measure burnout among physicians, APCs, and all employees. Sutter leaders believe that the more they educate clinicians on the causes of burnout (e.g., clinical, administrative, personal), the more progress they will make figuring out how to address it.

Reducing External Stress

One of Sutter's efforts to mitigate external stresses includes the development of a behavioral health service line that provides support to all Sutter employees, including assistance with work-life balance. Additionally, Sutter's benefit plan provides each employee member with free services for integrated healing, including interventions such as meditation and massage.

Sutter leverages these assets—and its behavioral health service line in particular—when they encounter high-stress events across the system. For instance, Sutter was recently forced to shut down one of their acute care hospitals due to the wildfires in Northern California. It was quickly able to provide support to over 140 employees who lost their homes.

Sutter also looks for every opportunity to use technology to make the day-to-day lives of clinicians easier. To reduce the impact of external stress on clinicians, Sutter is examining how to best leverage its single-instance Epic system (e.g., you can see across a patient's entire health experience with one view as opposed to each hospital or clinic having its own Epic database). The organization is also looking at

workflows within Epic (e.g., the number of “clicks,” inbox management) and how to leverage its telehealth system.

Sutter strives to remain sensitive to any additional task they ask employees to perform. For example, the organization will not implement new initiatives that do not support health in the workforce, meaningful contribution to patient care, or personal satisfaction with work. A question asked at every meeting is, “What can we stop doing today?”

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

In 2017, Sutter began a formal journey to become a high-reliability organization which includes awareness of clinician stress both within the work environment and with patients. They recognize safety as the focal point of balance between stress and stable systems.

Texas Health Resources

Reducing External Stress

Linda Nall, Vice President, Satisfaction Measurement and Improvement at Texas Health Resources, described a new department devoted to consumer experience that was spearheaded by Texas Health’s CEO. Existing patient and family advisory council members helped develop the consumer experience division and inform its work.

One of the new division’s workstreams focused on how to remove barriers employees face in the day-to-day work environment. Several key areas were identified for improvement, including:

- **Make the Journey Better:** Improve processes and communication
- **Invest in Employees:** Ensure employees have the necessary training to feel prepared
- **Make it the Best Place to Work:** Hire the right people for the right jobs and promote teamwork
- **Standardize System Processes:** Standardize technology and key enterprise processes
- **Address Local Issues:** Resolve issues that exist at the individual hospital level

In its extensive efforts to listen to employees, Texas Health learned that it does a good job helping employees cope with traumatic events that often occur in a health care setting. With the efforts of the new consumer experience division, it hopes to improve how the organization mitigates the external stress of day-to-day irritants as well.

Trinity Health

Amplifying Inherent Rewards

Trinity has recast the practice of nurse hourly rounds in the light of relationship and reward. Specifically, the benefits of hourly rounds as a best practice can be maximized when viewed as an opportunity to build up a colleague (i.e., care for colleague) or spend time truly listening to the patient (i.e., amplifying the inherent reward of meaningful patient relationships).

Trinity care teams are also engaging in the practice of “being in awe” by asking, “What happened over the past 12 hours with our team that leaves you in awe?” This practice gives clinicians permission to own and share their feelings. Trinity leaders believe that if you can name it, you can recreate it.

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Mary Beth Hardy, Vice President, People-Centered Care Experience at Trinity Health, has noticed that when clinicians have a leader who lives the mission and values of the organization, their trust in the leader increases and their stress levels decrease. Reducing burnout is, in part, about leaders building relationships with clinicians and having conversations with them that are driven by a mission mentality.

Trinity's mission cascades into five values and 20 associated actions. The actions intentionally include taking care of yourself and your colleagues, which reinforces how important mitigating inherent stress is to the organization. As a business, Trinity Health leaders understand the importance of lean management and driving out waste, but also take seriously the responsibility of keeping their values front and center. By clearly identifying self-care and care for colleagues as value-driven actions, it inoculates the organization with this way of thinking.

Reducing External Stress

If a clinician does not feel comfortable drawing attention to workplace stresses, those stresses gain undue influence. Trinity clinicians are empowered to call a "people-centered time-out" whenever they feel that they or their colleagues need to take a break for self-care or to care for a colleague. For instance, if a nurse is aware that no one on the unit has had lunch, he or she can call a time-out so that staff members can take turns having their meals.

UCLA Health System

Reducing External Stress

Tony Padilla, Chief Experience Officer at UCLA Health System, discussed the nuances of clinician stresses, noting that external stresses come in many forms, each with a different "cost." For instance, working with a disruptive colleague who creates a toxic work environment is demoralizing. A clinician may perceive he or she has no control over the situation and withdraw. This stressor comes with a high emotional cost to the physician.

In contrast, another type of external stress results from the desire and the drive to be innovative (e.g., to develop or discover new medical interventions). This may require the clinician to participate in activities that add hours to the workday, but it is an added stress that the clinician is willing to embrace because the emotional cost is much lower than working with a disrespectful colleague.

Some external stresses are more challenging to address than others. If the organization is working to improve a known stressor that will take some time to eliminate, leaders should make this known. Transparent leadership communication that acknowledges the presence of the stressor, the impact it is having on clinicians, and how the organization is helping clinicians to cope with the situation in the interim may—in and of itself—be a stress mitigator.

General Efforts Supporting a Culture of Wellness

UCLA Health has created a strong Urban Zen program to mitigate inherent and external stresses. Urban Zen is an interdisciplinary approach to alternative medicine and therapies that includes music therapy, aromatherapy, and mindful awareness. The organization has taught several hundred nurses to be certified to practice Urban Zen with patients and found the approach to be effective with clinicians as well. Although some UCLA staff still see the practice of Urban Zen as "hokey," it is gaining traction throughout the organization and is fast becoming an integral part of the culture.

University of Chicago Medicine

Mitigating Inherent Stress

Dr. Alison Tothy, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at University of Chicago Medicine, described an approach their Obstetrics department took to mitigate the inherent stress associated with being an OB caregiver. The department implemented a crisis management program in which an on-call support physician will come in to relieve the physician on duty when a traumatic event occurs (e.g., a precipitous delivery that results in a death or near miss). Additional funding, support of the department chair, and physician buy-in made this program possible.

University of Chicago physicians are offered support to help cope with the inherent stress of being a caregiver through Perspectives, the employee assistance program, on an as-needed basis. Additionally, Perspectives staff members lead workshops after a particularly traumatic event or after a series of events. The workshops are typically organized by the nursing side of the organization, which extends an invitation to physicians to participate. Many physicians also look outside the organization for help managing the stress that results from being a caregiver (e.g., hobbies, sleep, time with family or friends, exercise, volunteer work, advocacy work, religion).

Yale-New Haven Hospital

Amplifying Inherent Rewards

Susan Haufe, Chief Experience Officer at Yale-New Haven Hospital, shared that the organization recently approved implementing an interdisciplinary relationship-based communication training program. The program will amplify the inherent rewards of being a caregiver by helping clinicians to build better relationships with their patients.

Yale-New Haven will employ a model similar to that used by Northwell Health in its relationship-based communication training program (see Northwell Health section above). Six physicians and six nurses will be trained to facilitate the course. They will facilitate in dyads to ensure that the interdisciplinary audience experiences the content from both a physician's and a nurse's perspective.

Concluding Insights

Being a clinician is both inherently rewarding and inherently stressful—often for related reasons. As Dr. Thomas Howell from Mayo Clinic Health System aptly stated:

“I think if you asked doctors and nurses, ‘Why do you do this?’—one word about why you chose this profession. It’s not to be adulated or get adulation, and it’s not to be perfect. You want to be useful. If you do this better, it makes you more useful. And that’s I think at the core—that’s what we signed up for. The inherent stress, the inherent reward, I signed up for that.”

It is the added stress imposed by a dysfunctional or inefficient work environment that clinicians did not sign up for. External stresses are often at the root of clinician burnout. To address burnout effectively, organizations need a framework of distinct—but coordinated—strategies to mitigate inherent and external stresses, while concurrently amplifying inherent and external rewards.

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