



ABSTRACT

Google search for “Suicide among Physicians and Health-Care Workers” gave 29,60,00,000 results in .67 seconds. The medical profession while being a noble one, comes with a price. Doctors see pain and anxiety almost daily, are faced with hard decisions, have to convey bad news and understand mortality better than anyone else. The constant exposure to trauma and stress gets augmented by marked effects outside of work; long hours, no work–life balance, , difficult family relationships etc. The scars lie deep and thick and the ability to tread through them alone, hard...Doctors debate their insecurities within themselves, are terrified of being vulnerable in front of a third person, dread a breach of confidentiality and worry that any disclosure will impact their medical licence. This, plus the stigma associated with seeking professional mental health help and the lack of cost-covering becomes a huge barrier. As a result, they either self-medicate, indulge in substance/alcohol abuse or inflict self-injury. Undiagnosed and untreated neurosis accompanied by intense anger or frustration takes its toll and one day when the ritualistic self-injury ceases to provide them with the momentary sense of calm, the threat of Deliberate Self-Harm looms large. The suicidal rate across the globe is the highest among the medicos (Ventriglio et al., 2020). The acute COVID-19 outbreak has only increased the psychological distress among the doctors and nurses involved in frontline work. Burn out, combined with a sense of being trapped causes long-term loss of pleasure, feelings of inadequacy and an extreme sense of hopelessness (Lai et al.,2020). In other words, Major Depression. If not addressed, this could turn catastrophic for the medical fraternity. The integration of mental health services in our basic health care system should not remain a proposal and an afterthought. Evidence-based mental health evaluation and positive, supportive psychological interventions directed at medical professionals especially, are needed now more than ever. This paper “Only Human: Doctors in Distress” is a step towards bringing these critical aspects to light.

HOW PSYCHO-SOCIAL HELP CAN BE GIVEN TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS?

- TEACH COPING SKILLS like self-evaluation, positive self-attitude & reaching out
- ENCOURAGE SELF-RESCUE
- Make MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES LIST ACCESSIBLE
- Set up MULTIDISCIPLINARY MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAMS
- Make SCREENING FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCERNS REGULAR & MANDATORY for medical personnel on the frontline

THE WOUNDED HEALER: What stops Doctors from reaching out

- Unsure of confidentiality
- Fear of losing their jobs
- Fear of losing their peers' respect
- Fear of losing their ability to practice medicine

WHY WE SHOULD WORRY? Direct Consequences Of Ignoring The Mental Health Of Physicians

- Negative patient-related outcome/ Medication errors
- Reduction In Quality of diagnosis and care given
- Adverse doctor-patient interactions
- Severe burn out & Increased depression
- Increased suicidal ideation & completed act of suicide
- Dependence/abuse of substances
- De-personalization
- Chronic inefficacy leading to severe work related stress
- Displaced anger and frustration leading to damaged personal relationships
- Increased attrition/cost to hospital

THE WAY FORWARD

- A mental health contingency plan
- Policy changes starting from state
- Normalising mental health help among the medical community
- Recognizing early signs of mental illness and severe psychological trauma
- Hospital and organizations providing mental health care packages for staff
- Providing immediate generic guidance

WHAT DATA TELLS US

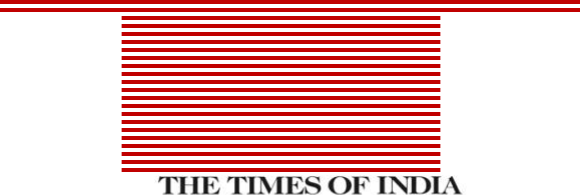
WORLD

- 40% physicians avoid mental health treatment over license fear(Mayo Clinic Proceedings, 2017) and discomfort around subject (Morning Consult, 2020)
- 60% doctors (Merritt Hawkins, 2018) & 80% medicos report burnout
 - o Rates higher in females, junior doctors & those working longer hours (Bhugra et al. 2019)
- Physicians risk of depression & suicide starts in medical school
- 16% of emergency room physicians met the criteria for PTSD (DeLucia et al, 2019)
- 87% emergency physicians experience severe stress & 73% expect stigma at work for seeking treatment (McGillick, 2020, ACEP)
- Medical professionals have higher rates of suicide risk than most other professions & the general population
 - o Male physicians- 1.4 times higher
 - o Women physicians- 2.2 times higher (ACEP 2019)

INDIA

- The Indian Medical Association (IMA)declared suicide among physicians “a public health crisis” to be “tackled before it was too late”(2018, The Hindu)
- 30% of Indian doctors go through depression
- 17% doctors contemplated Deliberate Self- Harm (Aug 2019, Financial express; IJP)
- Majority suicides among medical students
 - o More female doctors than male
 - o Most used lethal methods- hanging and medications
- Doctors have 2.5 times higher suicide risk than general population (Kishor, Chandran, Vinay & Ram, 2021)
- Mounting deaths, long hours, lack of resources, & risk of COVID-19 contributing to healthcare worker’s mental health crisis (Jul, 2020 EH News; May, 2021, The Hindu)

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How to Help Doctors Get Mental Health Care: Change the System
Structural barriers can prevent our health care heroes from getting the help they need, leaving them to suffer in silence.
By Jennifer Feist and Corey Feist
Sept. 9, 2021



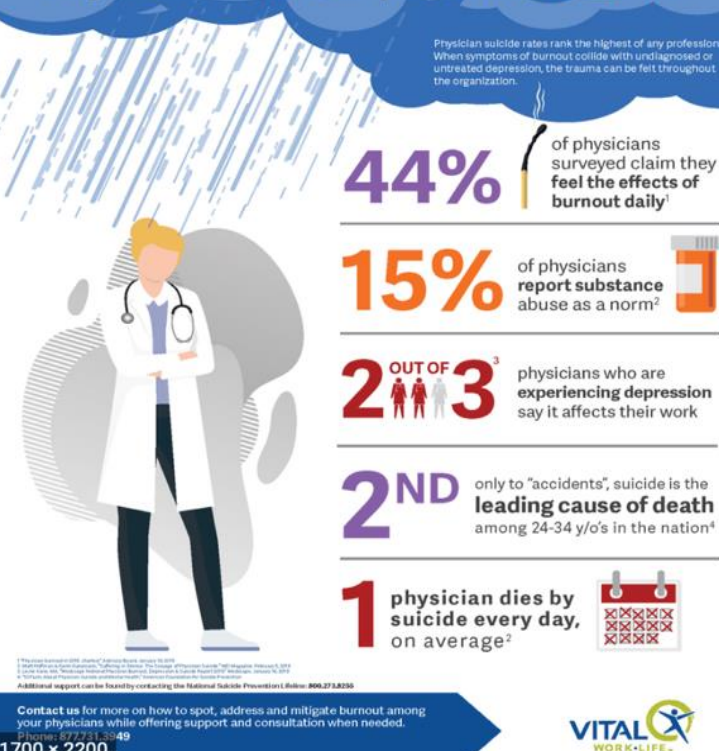
30% DOCTORS AFFECTED
According to ‘The Indian Journal of Psychiatry’, 30% Indian doctors and physicians go through depression, while 17% have thought of ending their life
Physician suicide is a public health crisis, and about four doctors per 10,000 people commit suicide every year

Out of 30 suicides, majority of the suicides were from medical education institutions



Weathering the Storm
Physician Burnout, Depression and Suicide

MEDIA, MEDICOS & MENTAL HEALTH



Mumbai: 29-year-old doctor ends life by injecting unknown substance

Updated on: 04 June, 2021 04:43 PM IST | Mumbai
Vishal Singh | vishal.singh@india-today.com

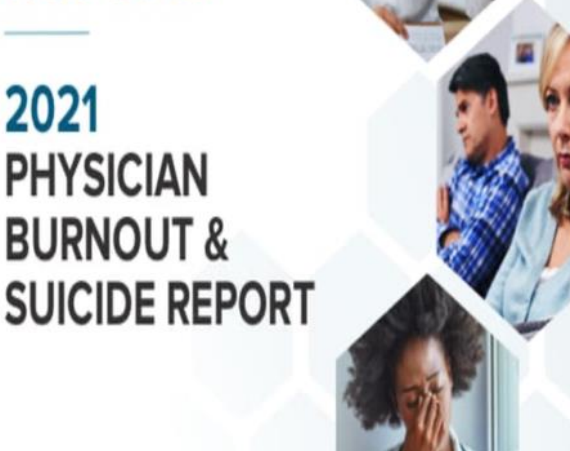
Share: f t w

She injected an unknown substance in her room which deteriorated her health. Later, she came out and informed her mother about it.



'DEATH BY 1000 CUTS'

2021 PHYSICIAN BURNOUT & SUICIDE REPORT



Contact us for more on how to spot, address and mitigate burnout among your physicians while offering support and consultation when needed.
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