



View from the Pyramids: The Upside of Stress?

AAOJ Editor-in-Chief Janice Upton Blumer, DO, FAAO

EDITORIAL

If ever there was a period of time where anxiety and stress were at the forefront, it would be the past 19 months. COVID has stretched us to the limits of our human stress gauges. Add the deluge negative news, weather disasters, economic forecasts and joblessness due to COVID-19 and you have a surefire recipe for burnout. When you are in a profession with a high burnout rate already, it only compounds the issue. In my conversations with many physicians recently, I don't know a single one that is not experiencing increased stress at work, and dare I say, burnout symptoms. These have been compounded by the constant threat of COVID infections, increased surveillance and tracking and workload.

According to therapist Julia Chan in a recent CNN article, record numbers of Americans have quit their jobs, and more than 40% are thinking of doing the same. So prevalent is the concept of burnout that the WHO recognized workplace burnout as a medical diagnosis in 2019.

Burnout can stem from not feeling valued at work, being overlooked for a promotion, or not having clear boundaries. Compounded with pressures at home and you have a ticking time bomb.¹

Dike Drummond, MD, of "The Happy MD," has made a career out of helping physicians recover from burnout. He published his book "Stop Physician Burnout, What to do When Working Harder Isn't Working" in 2014, and it is more applicable today than ever. He talks about the three main measurements of burnout as 1. Exhaustion, 2. Depersonalization, and 3. Lack of Efficacy. These can show up as cynicism or "What's the Use?" attitudes.² Who among us has not had at least one of these measurements this past 19 months?

“ The WHO recognized workplace burnout as a medical diagnosis in 2019. ”

But according to Chan, stress is inevitable, but burnout doesn't have to be. So, what IS the "highest and best" purpose for burnout? It is a sign we need to refill our own batteries, find what brings us joy and get off the superhighway of stress for a bit. In this issue of AAOJ, I would add OMT to the list of things that help us recover from stress. A simple CV 4 technique can lower our pulse rate and, well applied, can decrease our autonomic response to stress. Removing somatic dysfunction can help our "biopsychosocial" domain of the 5 models of osteopathic care and help us recover our balance.

As caregivers, we are prone to empathy fatigue, which can cause us to depersonalize our care. When that happens, it is time to set yourself back on the right course with some OMT, mindfulness, connecting with loved ones and nature, or enjoying a walk you're your favorite animal companion. Whatever it is, I encourage you to find what brings *your* balance back because we need you. You are valued!

So, remember the "upside" of burnout and take some time to restore *your* balance, find your favorite osteopathic practitioner, unplug, or practice some mindfulness. You are the only one of YOU in our profession and where would we be without you!

In gratitude,

Janice Blumer DO, FAAO, Editor in Chief



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References

1. Chan, J. M. (2021, October 26). Stress is a part of life. Burnout doesn't have to be. CNN. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/26/health/staying-well-burnout-jeanie-chang/index.html>.
2. Drummond, D. (2014). *Stop physician burnout: What to do when working harder isn't working*. Dike Drummond.