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Short Communication

Burnout among Accident and Emergency Physicians in Eastern Cape South Africa

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Abstract

Burnout is common among professionals and not exclusively among doctors. This article should be considered as a cautionary reference for Accident and Emergency Doctors, Senior Managers and Heads of Department, not to overuse young medical professionals to an extent that they fall sick and even die.

Introduction

As an Accident and Emergency Physician for more than thirty years at a regional hospital in Mdantsane, the second biggest township after Soweto, our hospital presently sees in the Accident & Emergency Department more than three thousand four hundred patients every month. We worked without protective garments during the beginning of Covid pandemic resulting in severe covid afflictions to doctors and nurses. Burnout and total exhaustion resulted because of the resulting lower number of doctors and nurses. Long hours of work are often due to the Head of Department and Clinical Managers not doing calls as they believe they are far senior and seem ashamed to sit on the seat of an Accident and Emergency doctor.

Clinical Presentation

Burnout or complete exhaustion are due to very few doctors seeing a vast number of patients Aggravating this, bullying and abuse of seniority results in the junior doctors working until they breakdown. Nobody takes responsibility and some of our junior doctors have had to seek private psychiatry help. [1]

- Continuous headache
- Behavioural changes and agitation towards working colleagues and patients
- Forgetfulness and writing drugs in the prescription which are not helpful to patients
- Anxiety
- Nausea and vomiting
- Taking drugs during their sleep time
- Low blood sugar and low blood pressure

Insufficient doctors in the Accident and Emergency Department as senior medical officers do not wish to do any calls. Telephonic advice from a senior doctor sleeping at home does not help in alleviating the patient's problems. During the Covid period four nurses passed away and nearly all the medical doctors were afflicted with the Covid inspite of taking the anti-Covid vaccine. The Accident and Emergency Department is not recognized and has been made a part of Family Medicine. There is always a bitter struggle between doctors of Accident and Emergency and Family Medicine. Junior doctors are not trained in Basic Life Courses, Advanced Cardiac Life Support Courses and Advanced Trauma Life Support. [2,3]

Doctors as victims

Doctors as victims to Burnout syndromes are:

- Falling asleep while driving from one hospital to another. We've had cases of head-on collisions and chest injuries due to the impact of the steering wheel.
- Committing Suicide after being bullied by the head of the department.
- Permanent brain damage from a fall over from burn out syndromes

Conclusion

Who is responsible in a junior doctor burn out syndrome?

- Senior Management who believes that the number of medical officers in Accident and Emergency are correct, resulting in them being forced to work as in a Russian Gulag
- Junior doctors afraid they might be called and shouted at by the head of the department.
- A maximum of six hours at a stretch should be implemented for doctors working in the accident and emergency department.
- Rest and holidays are a must for every junior doctor to work smoothly



- Registrar training for accident and emergency doctors must be given to build confidence among all.
- South African Medical Journal and South African Medical Association have to be in the forefront exposing burnout syndromes among doctors

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