Trends in Addressing Clinician Burnout

More efficient use of technology, redesigned workflows keys to success.

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—Susan Locke, MD
Physician Informaticist
Adventist Health Hanford, Calif.

Clinician burnout continues to negatively affect many aspects of healthcare delivery, impacting several areas from care quality to patient satisfaction. Proving the issue is still very much front and center for today’s healthcare organizations, burnout even made headlines earlier this year when the World Health Organization officially designated it as a syndrome.

“Strong predictors of physical and emotional burnout can forecast poor patient outcomes, safety concerns, increased errors and even hospital-acquired infections,” says Constance McLaughlin, RN, senior regional clinical executive, Cerner.

“Knowing the documented predictors of stress that lead to clinician burnout enables leaders to take the necessary steps to lessen the burden in the workplace.”

While many remedies for burnout have been used over the years—including improved work-life balance and self-care—some of today’s most innovative approaches to burnout incorporate cutting-edge technology and consider the issue from a more holistic perspective, according to Lu de Souza, MD, FAAP, senior director/CMO, Cerner.

Through ongoing client support efforts and incorporating findings from independent clinician satisfaction studies, such as KLAS’ Arch Collaborative, Cerner has identified several burnout remedies that are linked with potential improvement. They include:

- **The presence of strong, caring, visible leaders** within an organization who can create what de Souza deems a “cultural shift” in thinking about burnout within an organization. “Being visible and caring, talking to clinicians and involving them in the solutions to burnout is important,” she says.

- **Redesigning of clinical practice** so the entire care team is leveraged to the best of their abilities and practicing at the top of their licenses.

- **Mastery of technology solutions, such as the EHR, and supportive training.** Recent findings from the Arch Collaborative suggest that the EHR could contribute to feelings of burnout if clinicians feel like it does not enable them to be efficient or deliver quality care. “The EHR should not be a hurdle for clinicians but a tool that they know how to use well for patient care and delivery,” de Souza says. That is why Cerner is committed to helping clinicians become more comfortable and proficient with their EHR.

Innovative Burnout Solutions

As a board-certified internal medicine physician with an active clinical practice, Susan Locke, MD, knows firsthand how the pressures of practicing medicine in today’s healthcare environment can lead to professional burnout. That’s why Locke, who is also a physician informaticist at Adventist Health, Hanford, Calif., has dedicated the past several years to combating burnout through increased staff training on the EHR and reimagined, smarter workflows.

Knowing that one major contributor to clinician burnout is lack of sufficient work-life balance, Locke and her colleagues, using the Cerner Advance tool, reviewed the number of

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hours physicians spent in the EHR. They discovered that physicians were spending a significant amount of time entering data into the EHR not only during work hours but after hours. Locke and her team also saw that the clinicians weren’t using the EHR to its full potential in terms of adopting solutions available to them within the EHR to increase efficiency.

“We were seeing that some physicians were spending up to 25 to 30 percent of their total time in the EHR from home,” Locke says. “Knowing that some of the key factors relating to EHR use that lead to burnout are unnecessary clicking and clerical tasks, we were also able to see that our physicians weren’t using the time-saving solutions within the EHR that can decrease the amount of time necessary to complete their work.”

With that in mind, Locke and her team developed a training program for physicians to help maximize their efficiency within the EHR. The results were positive. For example, when the team provided training for physicians on using the Cerner Quick Orders tool within the EHR, physicians saved two minutes per patient, which added up to nearly one hour every day.

Improving physicians’ EHR usage, however, was just one part of the story when it came to reducing clinician burnout. Locke and her team realized that to really make a difference, they needed to improve how the entire care team—from the front office, to medical assistants, to nurses, to physicians—worked together.

Locke and her team trained the rest of the clinical and office staff using the same method they used to train physicians. The training program, titled “Our Patient’s Story,” aimed to increase staff members’ technical proficiency in the EHR, free up more of their time to be better used elsewhere and to make sure each member of the team felt like his or her work was valuable.

The team training, which so far has reached 55 clinics, nearly 500 staff members and 400 physicians, has resulted in reduced redundant entries made in the EHR during patient care visits and elimination of unnecessary clicking and navigation within the EHR, saving the majority of staff members up to 30 to 60 minutes per day. Other results include improved patient satisfaction, quality scores and staff satisfaction, with all team members reporting a greater sense of value and purpose in their work.

**Leveraging Technology to Reduce Burnout**

With technology use a known burnout contributor, how can healthcare leaders work to relieve some of the stress on today’s providers? Cerner’s McLaughlin recommends leaders focus on the following three steps:

1. **Train and support clinical staff** and allow them proper time to adjust to technologies.

2. **Ensure the organization’s informatics team is focused on support efforts** and connected to care process workflows. “Your informatics department should know how well your staff adopt and adapt to technologies,” says McLaughlin.

3. **Be aware of your healthcare IT governance process**. “The process should be clear and understood by all in the organization, and staff should be included in decisions that affect them,” McLaughlin says.

“If we want to decrease clinician burnout, we need to give them time and resources to really master the EHR and to examine and question the current workflows in place,” adds Adventist Health’s Locke. “We need to evaluate redundancies and maximize collaboration of the care team by leveraging the technology to its highest capability.”

*For more information, please contact Cerner at cernerphysiciancommunity@cerner.com.*