



The Burnout Epidemic

*Why Employers Must Address Work-Related Burnout –
And How Telebehavioral Health Can Help*

Nicholas Lorenzo, MD, MHCM, CPE, FAAPL
Chief Medical Officer, MeMD

Chad J. Snyder, MA, PhD, LPC
Clinical Director, Behavioral Health, MeMD





**A full two-thirds
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- 2018 Gallup Survey

Overview

Job burnout among U.S. employees has reached crisis proportions. Long hours, impossible workloads, unrealistic demands and job insecurity are taking a serious toll on workers' mental and physical well-being. Indeed, in May 2019, burnout officially earned recognition by the World Health Organization as a medical diagnosis characterized by work-related exhaustion, diminished productivity and feelings of cynicism and detachment from one's job.

A 2018 Gallup survey indicated that 23% of employees reported feeling burned out at work "very often" or "always," while an additional 44% shared they felt burned out "sometimes." This means a full two-thirds of workers are

experiencing burnout at work. While it exists across all industries, the incidence of burnout is even higher in healthcare, education, public safety, high-tech, social work and other high-stress, high-demand professions.

Unfortunately, the impacts of burnout are severe and far-reaching. In the workplace, it's evidenced by absenteeism, low morale, diminished commitment, dissatisfaction with job performance and job-hopping – and that's just the beginning. Workplace stress can create a ripple effect on one's mental and physical health.

Quite simply, work is making us sick.

Beyond the staggering human cost of burnout, it's also a significant source of healthcare spending. Workplace stress causes additional expenditures of \$125 to \$190 billion per year – or 5% to 8% of our nation's healthcare spending.²

Clearly, businesses must put a stake in the ground to alleviate the causes of burnout.

Behavioral healthcare is one clear solution. When delivered virtually, behavioral healthcare is practical, affordable and, quite frankly, becoming essential in many industries.



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- *The Relationship Between Workplace Stressors and
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Burnout Defined

Burnout is commonly defined as a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job.

Burned-out employees report that they work too many hours for too little pay. They don't receive enough support from management, feel they are treated unfairly and say they carry an unmanageable workload with unreasonable time pressures.



The Impacts of Burnout

In the Workplace

All told, burnout is a costly issue with serious implications for individual and organizational health.

- Burned-out workers are **63% more likely to take a sick day** (Gallup).¹
- Presenteeism among employees with depression – a common issue for people experiencing burnout – led to the equivalent of **32 lost workdays a year** (Center for Workplace Mental Health).³

- Burned-out employees are **2.6 times as likely to be hunting for a new job** (Gallup).¹
- 95% of HR leaders said **burnout is sabotaging workforce retention** (Kronos Inc. and Future Workplace).⁴
- Workplace pressures and fears are the leading source of stress for U.S. workers – by a long shot – and this **job-related stress has steadily increased** over the past few decades (American Institute of Stress).⁵

Beyond high rates of absenteeism and turnover, employees suffering burnout also experience low morale, demonstrate a lack of commitment to their work and feel detached and dissatisfied with their performance.

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On Mental Health

- › In an analysis of studies evaluating the effects of job burnout, researchers determined it is a strong predictor of depressive symptoms or antidepressant treatment.⁶ Reinforcing this finding, an 18-month study of 5,000 healthy workers demonstrated a **clear connection between burnout and depression.**⁷
- › Numerous studies on healthy employees also show that **burnout is a strong predictor of insomnia,**⁸ which likely compounds the feelings of exhaustion reported by burned-out employees.
- › Workers sufferings from recurrent or chronic stress engage more frequently in unhealthy behaviors, such as **poor diet, low physical activity and alcohol abuse.**⁷

On Physical Health

- › Chronic stress wreaks havoc on all systems of the body, leading to **short- and long-term medical problems.**
- › Stress itself **deteriorates physical health,** but the issues are made worse by the indirect impacts of burnout-related behaviors like poor diet and low physical activity.⁷
- › Work stress **impairs immune function,** increasing susceptibility to flu-like viruses, the common cold, gastroenteritis and other infectious conditions.⁷ It is also associated with **poor sleep, headaches, prolonged fatigue** and **musculoskeletal pain.**
- › Multiple studies have linked burnout to a host of serious and even life-threatening conditions including **high cholesterol, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes** and **coronary heart disease.**⁷
- › Perhaps most alarming, burnout also **increases the risk of heart attack and death before age 45.**⁷
- › Workplace stress contributes to at least **120,000 deaths in the U.S. each year.**²

High-Burnout Industries

The problem of burnout is especially pressing in high-stress, high-demand industries.

Public Safety

First responders are repeatedly exposed to painful experiences, often have erratic sleep schedules and rarely have time to process their experiences.

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that **30% of first responders develop mental health conditions**, compared to only 20% of the general population.⁹
- Even more alarming, burned-out officers have a **significantly higher suicide risk**, with those reporting burnout at work showing a 117% greater likelihood of suicidal ideation.¹⁰
- A Florida State University study showed **46.8% of firefighters had experienced suicidal thoughts**, while 19.2% had made suicide plans and 15.5% had attempted to take their own lives.¹⁰
- Another national survey indicated **27% of firefighters struggle with substance abuse** and a full 65% show symptoms of PTSD. More than 80% of those surveyed reported that reaching out for help would make them seem weak or “unfit for duty.”¹⁰



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Mental Healthcare

Numerous studies estimate that behavioral health issues affect 21-67% of mental health workers, with especially high rates of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.¹¹

For example, a full 48% of U.S. social workers experience high levels of personal distress as a result of their work.¹² Indeed, secondary traumatic stress (STS) is now considered an occupational hazard of working with traumatized populations.

Ironically, despite a growing prevalence of burnout among mental health professionals, the mental health field has paid little attention to the well-being of its own workers.¹² Moreover, in public mental health, burnout is costly and considered “economically wasteful,” especially given the expense of recruiting and training staff.¹²

Healthcare

Widespread burnout among healthcare professionals is a major focus of the national healthcare discourse. They often face long working hours, high patient loads, limited time and resources and an imbalance between work and home.



- › Many clinicians – especially nurses in intensive-care units and in mental healthcare – show **high rates of PTSD symptoms**.¹³ The same holds true for emergency healthcare workers who experience an emotionally distressing work event.¹³
- › Nurses who exhibit emotional exhaustion are more likely to have higher rates of presenteeism, and both **emotional exhaustion and depersonalization** have affected nurses' perceptions of high-stress job demands.¹⁴
- › **63% of nurses say their work has caused job burnout**, and two out of five report they've considered changing hospitals in the past year due to burnout.¹⁴
- › Physician burnout leads to a **higher rate of turnover, lower productivity, lower quality of care and decreased patient satisfaction and safety**.¹⁵
- › Physicians experiencing burnout were more than **twice as likely to leave their organization** within two years. Those who quit reported higher anxiety, depression and sleep-related impairment.¹⁶

Physician burnout adds \$5 billion per year to U.S. healthcare spending.



The physical and psychological impacts on healthcare providers are part of the problem. The staggering costs of turnover and reduced productivity are another. For example, the cost to replace one physician is estimated at \$500,000 to \$1 million.¹⁷ Moreover, a 2019 report published

in the Annals of Internal Medicine estimates that physician burnout adds \$5 billion per year to U.S. healthcare spending.¹⁸

Education

The education profession is plagued with burnout, not surprising given the notoriously low compensation and excessively high expectations of teachers. Across the nation, burnout-related turnover continues to rise,¹⁹ and fewer students are studying to become teachers.

- › The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reported a **23% decline in the number of people completing teacher-preparation programs** between the 2007-08 and 2015-16 academic years.²⁰
- › Teachers consider burnout a **byproduct of the profession** and do not attend to their own mental health needs.²¹
- › In a 2017 survey of educators, **teachers reported poor mental health for 11 or more days each month** – twice the rate of the general workforce – along with lower-than-recommended levels of health outcomes and sleep per night.²²

High-Technology

Working for a high-tech company is practically synonymous with long hours, impossible deadlines and the relentless race to get a product to market.

The issue of burnout among high-tech professionals was brought into stark context when Blind, an anonymous community app for the workplace, surveyed its users in May 2018. A total of 11,487 people responded to the survey and 57.16% reported they currently suffer from workplace burnout.²³ While 24/7 connectivity is an issue across U.S. professions, it's even more severe in high-tech companies.

The Efficacy of Behavioral Health

There's no "one-size-fits-all" solution for addressing burnout among U.S. workers. In every industry and in every company, there are a multitude of variables at play. However, two things are certain:

- Behavioral health in the workplace must be **addressed from the top down**.
- Behavioral healthcare is a **proven method** for helping employees deal with burnout.

According to the Center for Workplace Mental Health, thousands of clinical studies have shown that therapy is highly effective for mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment and relapse prevention. The analysis showed a full 80% of employees who received treatment reported improved workplace productivity and satisfaction.²⁴

Mental health therapists can:

- Help employees establish appropriate boundaries
- Work through interpersonal challenges at home and at work
- Develop healthy coping mechanisms
- Make necessary lifestyle changes to prevent mental and physical health problems

Ultimately, businesses that provide behavioral health services can help employees deal with workplace stress in a healthy and appropriate way. In doing so, they improve employee productivity while decreasing medical and disability costs.



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Barriers to Behavioral Healthcare

While the business benefits of providing behavioral health services are clear, employers are plagued by the same access issues that affect the rest of the country.

- **Cost:** Insurance networks are so narrow that many therapists are not covered by the employer's health plan. According to a 2017 research report by Milliman, **employees with mental health or substance abuse problems are far more likely to encounter high out-of-pocket costs** that make treatment unaffordable – even if they're insured.²⁵

- › **Access:** The issue is exacerbated by a critical shortfall of mental health providers nationwide. According to Mental Health America, more than **100 million Americans live in areas where behavioral health services are severely limited** – and the shortage is expected to get worse.²⁶ In many cases, people who need care must travel long distances or wait months to see a provider. It's no surprise that nearly **60% of U.S. adults with a mental health condition do not receive proper treatment.**²⁶
- › **Stigma:** The stigmas of mental illness and seeking care **create additional roadblocks** for people suffering from mental and emotional issues. *Psychology Today* reported in 2017 that many individuals expressed shame or embarrassment about their diagnoses.²⁷ And, in male-dominated workforces like fire departments, law enforcement agencies and emergency medical services, this stigma means workers suffering burnout are much less likely to reach out for help.

Enter Telebehavioral Health

Telebehavioral health overcomes limitations of geography, narrow provider networks and the stigma of mental health treatment. It is uniquely positioned to fill the gaps in behavioral health services, enabling businesses to address their employees' mental and emotional wellbeing and ultimately improve productivity and boost the bottom line.

Its efficacy, too, is well-proven.

- › The Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness reports that **telebehavioral health is effective in treating depression, anxiety, PTSD, sleeplessness and other burnout-related mental health issues.**²⁸
- › Harvard Medical School found that workers who received telephone interviews for depression **improved their productivity by 2.6 hours weekly**, equating to about \$1,800 a year.²⁹ They were also more likely to keep their jobs than those who didn't receive intervention, saving their employers turnover-related expenses.²⁹
- › A study published in *JAMA* showed employees with depression who received telephone-delivered coaching, care coordination and cognitive behavioral therapy had **considerably reduced depression symptoms, higher job retention and increased hours spent at work** at the six-month and one-year mark.³⁰

Telebehavioral health is effective in treating depression, anxiety, PTSD, sleeplessness and other burnout-related mental health issues.

- › Telebehavioral health interventions are also effective in improving medication adherence and reducing hospitalization by as much as 30% among people with behavioral health and/or medical comorbidities.²⁸ In addition to quality of life improvements, this can drastically reduce medical costs. A good therapist can also make early diagnoses and preempt the human and hard costs of untreated behavioral health conditions.

Of course, telebehavioral health only works if patients are satisfied with the service. Perhaps not surprising in today's tech-first culture, new data shows very high satisfaction scores and lower attrition rates among people who have sought treatment via telebehavioral health vs. in-person therapy.²⁸

How Employers Can Leverage Telebehavioral Health to Address Burnout

Telebehavioral health is simple, streamlined and patient-centric, enabling employees to request services and schedule sessions at their convenience and from the privacy of their homes. This is an important distinction because, according to the 2017 Connected Patient Report from Salesforce Research, individuals increasingly prefer accessing healthcare remotely vs. visiting a provider's office.³¹

Therapy takes place virtually – usually via a video connection – and is appropriate for burnout as well as a host of other common mental and emotional issues including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, trauma, marital and family problems, eating disorders, grief and numerous other personal and professional stressors.

Telebehavioral health platforms, typically available online and via an app, offer the following advantages over traditional, in-person therapy:

- › **Quick and convenient** access to mental health services
- › **Sessions are scheduled** at the employee's convenience
- › **Mitigates** provider shortage issues
- › Therapy can happen from home, **removing barriers associated with stigma**



MeMD Brings Flexible, Easy-to-Implement Telebehavioral Health Solutions to Employers

In early 2018, national telehealth provider MeMD launched behavioral health services for employer groups and consumers across the country.



Access & Convenience

- Available to employer groups and individuals, MeMD members log on from their computer or mobile device and select their desired appointment date and time. **Therapy sessions are 50 minutes each.**
- In **as little as 48 hours**, members are connected with a provider who is licensed in their state. This is a major advantage, especially for someone facing a mental health crisis who can't afford to wait.
- Sessions can be **scheduled at the members' convenience and in the privacy of their own homes**, or wherever else they choose.

Quality Assurance

- MeMD's network of behavioral health providers includes **Licensed Professional Counselors, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists** and other equivalent licensed professionals.
- MeMD uses the standards of the **National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA)** to credential each provider through primary-source verification of education and training, clinical work experience, licensure information and claims history.

Outcome-Based Care

- MeMD has built scientifically developed and validated measurement and **outcome-based care** into its model. This is a point of difference from other behavioral health services—virtual and in-person.
- Those who request a therapy session are prompted to complete the Behavioral Health Screen, a multi-dimensional, comprehensively validated assessment tool. An **advanced algorithm ranks risk factors across 16 domains**, providing benchmarks for progress and improvement.
- Use of the screening tool is **not limited to employees requesting therapy**. It may be distributed to an entire employee group. Employees whose scores indicate they are suffering from a mental or emotional issue will be reminded they have a behavioral health benefit available – all while safeguarding their anonymity.

Ease of Implementation

- Employers can be **up and running** with MeMD's telebehavioral health solution **within weeks**.
- MeMD offers **flexible pricing options**.
- MeMD offers **customized APIs** for streamlined administration.



Schedule a Demo

With telebehavioral health, businesses can provide critically important benefits to employees suffering from burnout and other mental and emotional challenges. On a small scale, this improves employees' mental and emotional wellbeing while also boosting a company's bottom line. On a larger scale, businesses offering telebehavioral health can help solve the burnout crisis facing U.S. businesses and employees.



Contact solutions@memd.me to explore the business benefits of telebehavioral health or schedule a demo.

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