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RESIDENT BURNOUT: WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

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Background: Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. Resident physicians have intense work demands, limited control and high responsibilities in the workplace, making them more vulnerable to job burnout.

Aim: To review studies in the medical literature that address the theme of burnout in residents and discuss relevant resources and interventions for residents with burnout.

Methods: MEDLINE and PubMed databases searches for peer-reviewed studies, published between 1990 and 2008, using combinations of the Medline Subject Heading terms professional burnout and internship and residency.

Results: The studies report high levels of burnout among residents. The reported residents' strategies for coping with stress are diverse and include talking with family, significant others or other residents and practicing physical activity. Some studies investigated the role of stress management workshops for residents, reporting decline of emotional exhaustion levels in residents after the workshops.

Discussion: The literature on resident burnout is still sparse. The reviewed studies suggest that residents from various specialties, internationally, experience burnout. Understanding resident burnout can be enhanced by more rigorous research, studying different intervention strategies. Burnout prevention and management can contribute to better personal outcomes and ultimately provide better patient care.