

# Burnout Syndrome in Greek Doctors: The Role of Specialty

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## ABSTRACT

Doctors are in continuous interaction with patients which leads to burnout syndrome. The purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of burnout syndrome among doctors and the role of medical specialty. Doctors (N=214) of various specialties and positions from two public hospitals completed the Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) which measures the burnout syndrome and its dimensions. Demographic and professional data were recorded. Data were analyzed via the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21. The significance level was set at 0.05%. The overall index in the provincial hospital ranged at 2.13 while in the university at 2.07 ( $p=0.65$ ). No significant statistical differences were observed between two hospitals regarding the dimensions of MBI. Internists showed lower level of personal accomplishment (Mean: 3.86,  $p=0.015$ ) compared to all other specialties (Mean: 4.22,  $p=0.015$ ). There was no significant statistical difference in the overall rate of burnout syndrome among the two hospitals, which was low for both hospitals. The factor "specialty" had an important effect on burnout syndrome.

## KEYWORDS

Burnout Syndrome, District Hospitals, Doctors, Maslach Burnout Inventory, Personal Accomplishment, Physicians, Public Hospitals, University Hospitals

## INTRODUCTION

According to WHO, burnout syndrome is considered to be a syndrome caused by chronic stress at the workplace, that has not been treated successfully. Three aspects characterize it: a) feeling of exhaustion or exhaustion, b) increased mental dissociation from one's job or feelings of negativity or cynicism associated with one's job, c) impaired job efficiency (WHO, 2019).

The meaning of job burnout is a phenomenon that appeared last decades, with significant effects on people, society, economy, and production progress. The issue appeared in the bibliography in the 1970s, and the distinctive symptoms that come out of physical and mental burnout are described primarily in people working in the field of health care. There is considerable interest to date as long as detailed bibliography that includes different groups of employees (Yang, & Fry, 2018; Bridgeman PJ, Bridgeman MB, & Barone, 2018).

Burnout is more common among health care professionals than other employees. Several scientific studies support that health care professionals exhibit high-stress proportions and are prone to occupational burnout syndrome (Bellali et al., 2007). Doctors of the national health system are

DOI: 10.4018/IJRQEH.2021010104

the pillars of a public health system, and the burnout syndrome's incidence has a significant impact on the regular function of a health system. The main reason is the level of interaction between health care professionals and patients. These professionals come in consistent contact with people suffering from a disease, so this continual interaction leads to chronic stress and burnout syndrome, especially in respect of doctors with first-line internships (internists, intensive-care specialists, etc.) (Shanafelt et al., 2012; Lamothe, Boujut, Zenasni, & Sultan, 2014).

Factors associated with occupational burnout maybe work (economic reasons, workload, exhausting shifts, daily dealing with death, lack of staff, bossiness and rigidity of administration, professional relationships) (Dimitropoulos & Filippou, 2008), individual (stress management, personal expectations, incentives) or social (family responsibilities). Long-lasting exposure of the doctors to poor working conditions leads to physical fatigue and eventually, to their burnout. The burnout they feel has adverse effects on both physical and mental health, leading to behavior disorders at the workplace as in personal and family life. These result to developing physical symptoms (insomnia, headache, musculoskeletal disorders, hypertension, coronary heart disease, metabolic disorders) (Salvagioni et al., 2017), mental symptoms (lack of interest, apathy, negative mood, development of cynism, lack of emotional control, emotional burnout, alienation, depersonalization) (López-López, 2019) and behavioral symptoms (impaired efficacy and occupational satisfaction, communication disorders with the rest staff, feeling of resignation, increase in days off, drug abuse) (Suñer-Soler et al., 2014; Dyrbye et al., 2019).

Furthermore, it seems that there is an association between the internship and burnout syndrome. Different internships have a different frequency, because of each one's different special features, such as workplace, workload, number of cases, the significance of morbidity, etc. According to international bibliography, doctors with internships associated with the first-line treatment of emergency cases, run a higher risk of burnout syndrome (Shanafelt et al., 2012). In particular, studies report that doctors working at emergency departments are observed to have more severe occupation burnout (Kansoun, 2019).

Expect for the internships; it appears that the hospital type (provincial or University) constitutes an occupational burnout factor for medical staff. Petropoulos's (2009) study concerning emotional burnout showed higher emotional burnout and feelings of reduced personal achievements among hospital doctors over primary health care doctors. The provincial hospital is aimed to provide service in secondary health care at a small geographic area of 160,000 residents. It has a lower potential for both workers and equipment. Unlike, a university hospital provides services in tertiary care. It has new high-tech technologies, more staff, and handles a geographically more extensive area of thousands of people.

Investigating the bibliography, it is confirmed that there are not many studies examining burnout syndrome, exclusively in the medical population. Most studies refer to mixed population samples, including doctors and nurses (Chou, Li, & Hu, 2014; Schooley, Hikmet, Tarcan, & Yorgancioglu, 2016; Reith, 2018). Conclusions most of the time, do not reveal the specific features that differentiate nurses from doctors.

Based on what is mentioned above, the present study aimed to investigate the levels of burnout syndrome and its aspects (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal achievements) in hospital doctors of the Greek health system. In particular, its goal was to examine if there are differences in burnout levels among doctors working at two different types of hospitals (provincial and university hospital) as well as between doctor's internships.

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