

festive fatigue

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eye

A SPECIAL REPORT
ON MANAGING BURNOUT IN
THE PHARMACY TEAM



Festive celebrations are now in full swing, but as one of the busiest times of year approaches, it's important for pharmacy teams to protect their mental health. **Millie Browning** finds out more

It's the most wonderful time of the year, but as the busy festive season approaches, pharmacies will be feeling the pressure.

"For many pharmacy technicians and support staff working in community pharmacy it can be very stressful as people look to ensure they have all the medicines they need for the festive period, often with difficulty as other services close," says Claire Steele, president of the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK).

"While this is a year round problem, it is magnified during the festive period. Pharmacy staff are tired after a long year and while everyone else is feeling cheery and excited for Christmas, they are under pressure and may even be close to burnout."

What is most important is that staff remember to take care of themselves over this period. Taking on too much work can have a serious impact on an individual and it is vital that pharmacy teams work together to help prevent burnout among their colleagues. So, what can be done?

What is burnout?

Burnout is a "syndrome resulting from chronic

workplace stress that has not been successfully managed," according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The Organisation officially recognised the condition in 2019 as an "occupational phenomenon" that is solely related to occupational stress and work environment, classifying it by three factors:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
2. Increased mental distance from one's job or feeling of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
3. Reduced professional efficacy.

Common reasons for burnout include:

- Unfair treatment in the workplace
- Lack of communication and support from managers
- Finding it impossible to meet deadlines
- Work-life imbalance
- Bigger workloads that are unmanageable
- Unclear job expectations
- Little control over working conditions.

Covid influence

It is no secret that since the pandemic working life in the pharmacy has changed exponentially. In particular, there is the added pressure of more services and

spotting the signs

Some 85 per cent of UK adults can correctly identified symptoms of burnout, according to a YouGov survey. In order to help the team, it's important to know the signs to look watch out for.

Common signs of burnout include:

- Feeling tired/drained most of the time
- Feeling helpless, trapped and/or defeated
- Feeling detached
- Having a cynical outlook
- Self-doubt
- Procrastinating and taking longer to get things done
- Feeling overwhelmed.

increased footfall as more and more people start to realise they can rely on the pharmacy team for help.

"Community pharmacies are seeing more patients than ever before with no appointment needed," says Melissa Dadgar, primary care pharmacist. "Lots of the work in pharmacies seems to go unnoticed, such as ordering prescriptions, dispensing, checking, methadone, targets and answering the phone."

But it's not only those in the pharmacy industry who are feeling the effects.

In fact, new analysis conducted by Glassdoor, a website where current and former employees can anonymously review companies, found that negative discussion around

burnout amongst UK workers has increased by 48 per cent in the last 12 months – hitting record levels.

According to Mental Health UK, across the country the working arena has changed but tactics to support colleagues has not. Indeed, just 23 per cent of people knew what plans their employers had in place to help spot signs of chronic stress and burnout in employees, while one in five said they felt unable to manage stress and pressure in the workplace.

"Burnout levels have skyrocketed in the last 12 months and companies need to take action," says Glassdoor economist, Lauren Thomas. "Placing employee experience

at the heart of company recruitment and retention strategies will slow the upward trend of burnout we've seen over the past year and ultimately make workplaces healthier and more productive."

Of course, burnout does not only impact an individual, but can have lasting external influence. In the NHS this can manifest in two specific ways:

1. Financial cost to the organisation

The cost of absenteeism can be detrimental to organisations, especially as the pandemic has caused significant patient waiting-list backlogs

is to improve understanding of the mental health and wellbeing of the pharmacy workforce.

The annual surveys help to inform the development of a programme of work to support improved mental health and wellbeing in the pharmacy. The findings suggest that a significant proportion of the workforce are continuing to report average, poor or very poor mental health and wellbeing.

Over the last two years, 89 per cent of respondents have reported a high risk of burnout as measured by the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, a standardised

“ Burnout levels have skyrocketed in the last 12 months ”

2. Patient care

How staff are feeling can impact the quality of care provided to patients. Staff who have constant exposure to traumatic events associated with caring responsibilities, such as methadone patients, can often also experience compassion fatigue.

tool for measuring burnout in healthcare professionals.

Furthermore, 68 per cent said they were negatively affected by their work, whilst 33 per cent had considered leaving their current role and 32 per cent had considered leaving the pharmacy profession altogether.

Almost three in five respondents were either offered but frequently unable to take a break or not offered a break during working hours. Additionally, many respondents were aware of the mental health and wellbeing support available but take up of services continued to be low.

RPS workforce wellbeing survey

Of course, burnout in pharmacy is not a new phenomenon. Since 2019, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) has worked alongside charity Pharmacist Support to conduct a 'Workforce Wellbeing' survey. The aim



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what can you do to support each other?

As we enter one of the busiest times of the year, those suffering from burnout may need extra support from their colleagues. Pharmaceutical manufacturer, Haleon, has composed a list of top tips on the best way staff can be there for each other:

1. Make your own health a priority

Focus on your physical and mental health. Endeavour to eat healthily, get plenty of sleep and take part in regular exercise. Whilst different things work for different people, share techniques you find useful with other members of your team and encourage them to look after their health by taking breaks and staying hydrated at work

2. Tackle problems as a group

Self care should be raised as an issue to discuss in staff meetings, particularly during busy periods. Encourage colleague to share tips on how they de-stress. This could involve meditation, venting to loved ones or taking their lunch break outside for a change of scenery

3. Show understanding

Explain that busy times can be stressful for everyone and highlight that as a team you are doing all you can to deliver for your customers. Don't be afraid to admit that you're feeling impacted too

4. Focus on the why

Remind your colleagues of your shared mission to provide healthcare advice and products for your local community

5. Be a source of optimism

Make sure you acknowledge your colleagues and thank them for their efforts. Aim to develop a community that supports one another and celebrates achievements together.

"As tensions inevitably rise in line with an increased workload, it is very important to remember to be kind to yourself and to each other," adds Claire Steele, president of the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK). "Pharmacy staff are very good at supporting each other through difficult times, but that team ethos can only go so far, particularly when someone is

struggling with burnout, stress or other mental health issues."

For individuals who are aware they are suffering from burnout, Haleon also offers this advice:

- **Connect with other people**

Make the effort to take to people and meet up in person. This can help provide emotional support and a sense of self worth

- **Be physically active**

The sense of achievement can cause chemical changes in your brain which can positively influence your mood

- **Learn a new skill**

Choose something that may not be related to your job. This can build your confidence and help you connect with others

- **Practise mindfulness**

Try to connect with your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Activities such as meditation or yoga may help

- **Give to others**

Whether it is volunteering for a charity or helping out in the community or your friends and family, this can help create a sense of purpose and reward outside of your job

- **Balance your diet and lifestyle**

Prevent dips in blood sugar which can impact your mood by eating regular meals. Drinking water can aid concentration. Aim to moderate caffeine and alcohol intake.

APTUK are also on hand to provide advice and support. "There is a useful wellbeing hub on our website for members, which contains help and resources on how to keep well when challenged by work and life pressures," says Ms Steele. "Additionally, as well as offering learning opportunities our branches also provide peer support. In a recent APTUK survey, 25 per cent of pharmacy technicians noted 'wellbeing' as a professional concern and APTUK will continue to work on supporting pharmacy technicians and their wellbeing."

Some of the barriers to accessing mental health support were identified as a lack of free time, concerns about confidentiality and the impact on a respondent's career as well as a general feeling among respondents that they should be able to manage without seeking additional help. "It's crucial to address

the root causes of poor mental health and wellbeing by driving down workplace pressures to help retain and support the pharmacy workforce," says Claire Anderson, president of the RPS. "This type of pressure is unsustainable without meaningful measures being taken to support pharmacy teams."

"It's important for employers to recognise the additional strain placed on community pharmacy teams at this time of year," adds Ms Steele. "[Employers] should do everything they can to support their employees to deliver a safe and effective service to the public, which includes ensuring the health and wellbeing of their staff." 