

## Going The Distance

### Avoiding Burnout Among Health Professionals

It is ironic that working in the field of the health professions is in itself an environment that can cause high rates of stress and burnout amongst professionals. The multiple demands and the at times conflicting, difficult and environment can be a source of strain and burden as well as being a great challenge and source of satisfaction. Sometimes the level of demand in managing difficulties can lead to a work overload causing an unhealthy level of hours, energy and worry being devoted to work which leads to an unbalanced lifestyle. Also, coping with the individual factors associated with working ads a health profession such as various shifts, and travel and time commitments where follow-up may be required, can further heighten the potential for excessive workload and over-focus on work demands and responsibilities.

Where such excessive workload occurs the risk for burnout is higher, and more attention to your own self management of work and life balance is required in order to maintain a balanced lifestyle and to continue to find your work rewarding and meaningful. The following tips are a starting point for you to avoid burnout and assist you in going the distance as a health professional:

#### **7 Tips To Avoid Burnout And Help You Go The Distance**

1. Maintain highly structured work hours so there is a clear change between work and non-work times even when you have to work long hours or work from home.
2. Set goals for your personal life in the areas of relationships, social (friends, family, hobbies and recreational interests) and lifestyle (i.e., sleep, diet and exercise) and see these as important (or more important) as any professional goals. Devote specific time, energy and commitment to these activities even when you don't feel like it.
3. Be self-aware and apply/ expand your knowledge of stress management and of your own psychological condition to promote your own coping and minimise the impact of negative emotions.
4. Expand your knowledge of healthy thinking, coping and relaxation techniques. Set goals and plan ahead and look for meaning, opportunity and growth in your personal life as well as in your professional life
5. Be more accepting and less demanding of yourself both personally and professionally and be kind and understanding towards yourself as you continue to balance work and life priorities. Learn to accept your mistakes and setbacks and learn from them.
6. Stay flexible with schedules of work and personal activities and allow some variability with each one when necessary. Balance is the key.
7. Seek assistance for yourself if needed. Seeking assistance when necessary is a great way further develop and expand the quality of your life. Remember, you cannot give what you do not have, and role modelling a low stress relaxed lifestyle is not only great for you but also for those around you.

### **Going the Distance In Summary**

Health Professionals working in technically and emotionally demanding roles are often at risk of burnout themselves and also may incur long-term frustrations and coping difficulties, which may lower the quality of services they provide.

In 'going the distance' (i.e., maintaining a long-term professional role in the field of work related stress) you should look after yourself both personally and professionally to avoid burnout and keep work fresh and interesting.

Review the seven tips discussed above and identify the key skills and strategies needed to enable you to continue to grow, develop and refine your personal and professional coping skills.

(Ref: Stebbins 2003)