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Medical Burnout and Suicide in Physicians

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Chair, Federation of State Medical Boards

November 24, 2016



**BURN
BRITE**

**BURN
OUT**

**UP
BURN
SUICIDE**

The scenario for a medical career



Programming of the Altruistic Medical Student

- Perfectionist
- Workaholic tendencies
- Superhero beliefs
- Emotion-free awareness
- Lone Ranger
- “Patient comes first”
- “Never show Weakness”

Burnout Characteristics

- ➔ **Emotional Exhaustion**
- ➔ **Dysfunction in behaviors with loss of Empathy and level of caring**
- ➔ **Feeling of work and involvement doesn't matter**

Statistics Related to Burnout

- 55% of U.S. physicians manifest at least one characteristic of burnout
- During medical school and residency the patterns to establish burnout become ingrained and affects >50% at certain times
- Often associated with depression
- Less than 20% seek mental health support
- Suicide rate > general public and highest in the 5th and 6th decades
- This because of concerns of effect on career opportunities if discovered
- Stress factors variable with the stage of career and specialty

Statistics Influencing Brazil Health Care

- General Population 203 million with 30 million in rural areas
- Physician shortage
 - Total 359,600 with distribution issues (1.8 MD/1000pop.)
 - Need for primary care and rural coverage
 - Conflicts over foreign physicians and licensure
- Need of investment in infrastructure and equipment
- Rural areas some towns with single physician
- Telemedicine beginning to develop networks

Crisis of Physician Suicide in Brazil

- **Sao Paulo Statistics**

- MD suicide rate 4.2/100,000 vs general population of 4.6 (2X>worldwide rate)
- MD age committed 46y/o vs general population of 65y/o
- Economic Burden to society is \$1.3 billion in 2001
- Higher rate in single, divorced or widowed with loss of support
- Barrier physicians felt for obtaining support with licensure, etc
- Is a regional issue 2x > in Southeast Brazil
- 13 vs 4 in cities of < 20,000 population
- Recommendations for Medical School education not significantly in place

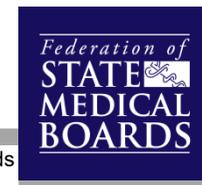
Rev Bras Psiquiatr
2015;2:(37);146-149



Six categories of Work Stress that can contribute to Burnout

1. **Excessive workload** - physical, cognitive and emotional
2. **Lack of control** - being able to influence work environment
3. **Poor balance between effort and reward** - material and intangible rewards
4. **Lack of community** - culture of mutual appreciation and teamwork
5. **Lack of fairness** - resources and justice
6. **Value conflict** - moral distress of having to participate in suboptimal, unethical circumstances

Maslach C, Leiter MP. The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It. San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass; 1997.



The Progression from Burnout to Burn Up

It's No Longer
Fatigue and Distress

BUT

Exhaustion and Breakdown

Current Healthcare Ecosystem

Uncoordinated Excessive Cognitive and Emotional Load



Macro Level
National, state, industry, regulatory

Socio-political Factors, Public Interest Groups, Business of Medicine and Profit Agendas, Bad outcomes: Reactive preventive measures

Reasonable Goal: Achieving excellence in patient care

Well-intended
Multiple Quality Metrics untested, multiple sources. To Err is Human, Patient Safety Movement uncoordinated Demand for increased CME MOC, MOL, multiple others as reflex solutions to errors **Patients as primary concern**

Not so well-intended
Hassle Factors by Insurance provider as cost control method. Profit preventing needed patient care. Healthcare as investment vehicle. **Shareholders as primary concern**

Reasonable profit margin: Helping growth and sustainability of Healthcare company

Healthcare Organization
Mitigate or Amplify = ?



Meso Level
Hospital/Healthcare system

Malpractice Risk Management

Personal Life
Debt from training
Duties in family
Relationships
Wishes
21 years of education
Self-sacrifice to achieve, personal cost, trapped feeling.

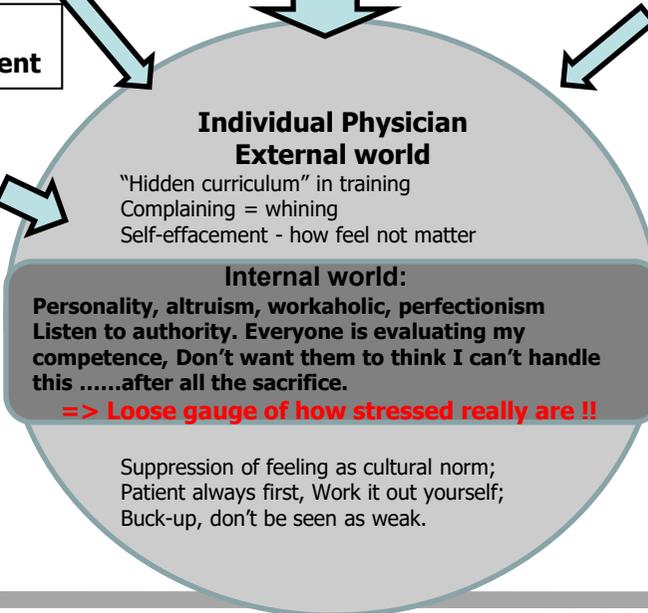


Exo Level
Individual and their family in daily life outside of medicine

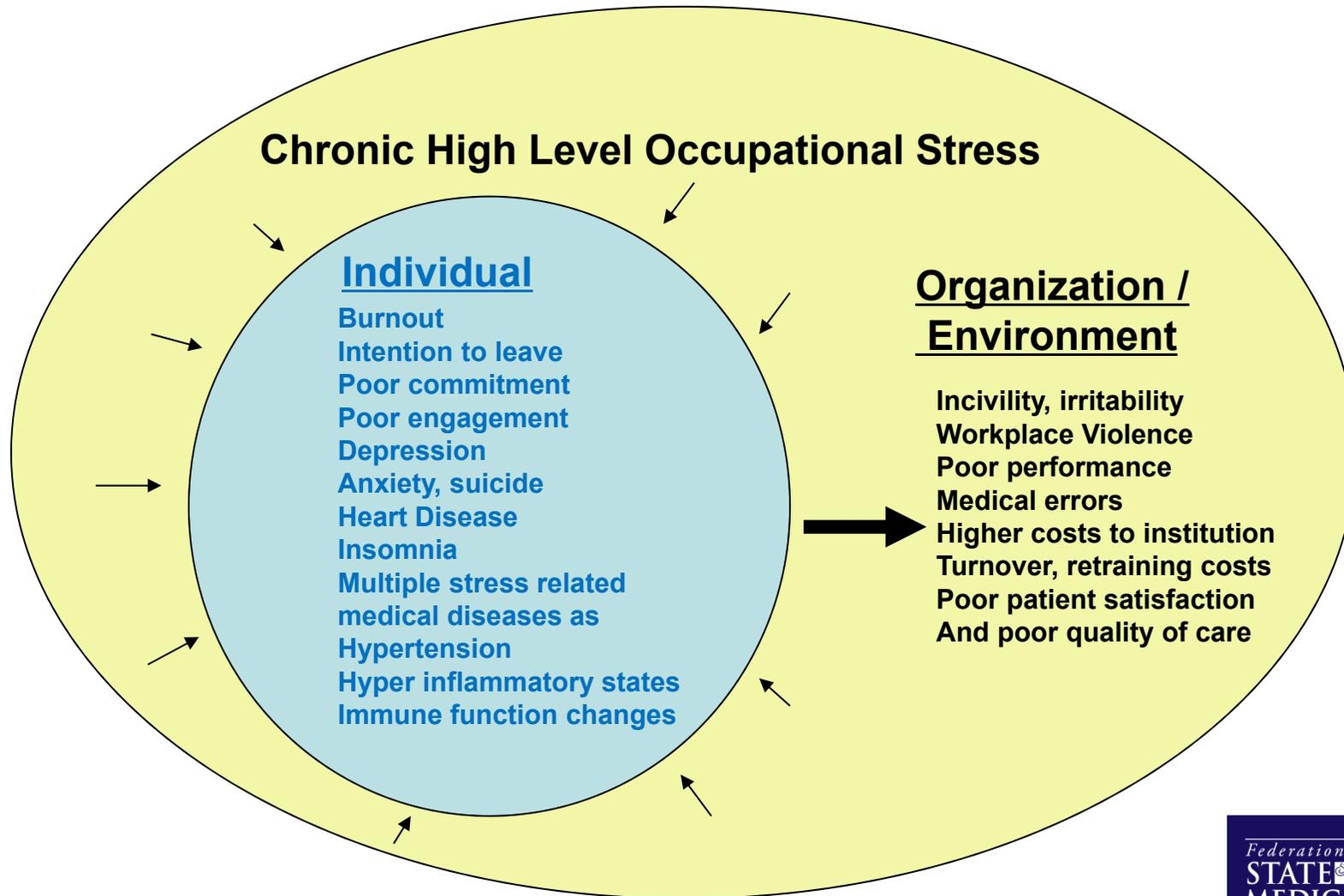


Micro Level
Individual clinician/staff with patients

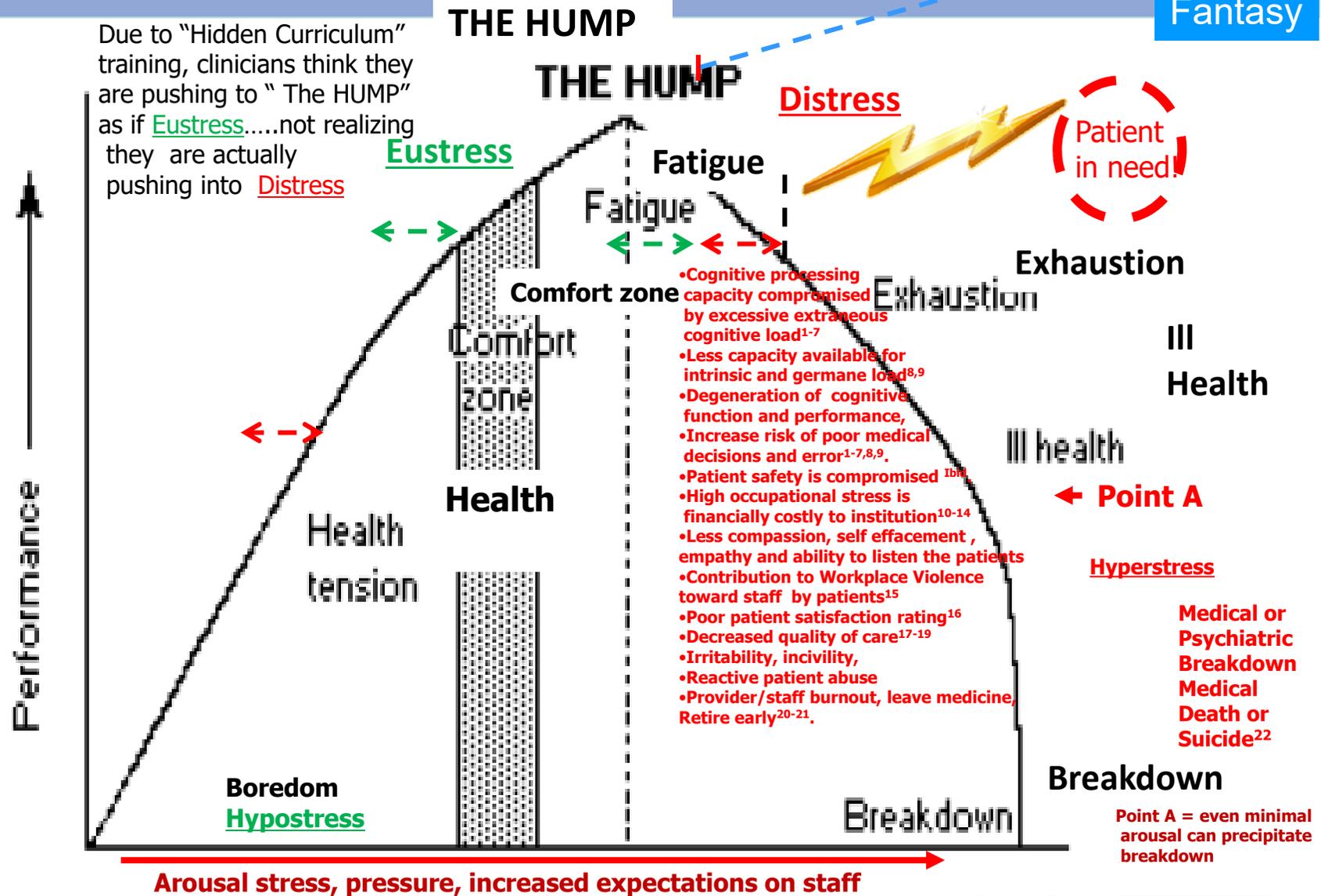
Being a doctor
Dealing with pain, sickness, death. **Emotion work** with stressed patients and families
Delivering bad news



Chronic High Level Occupational Stress Internally and Externally Directed Consequences



Human Function Curve in Average Clinician/Staff



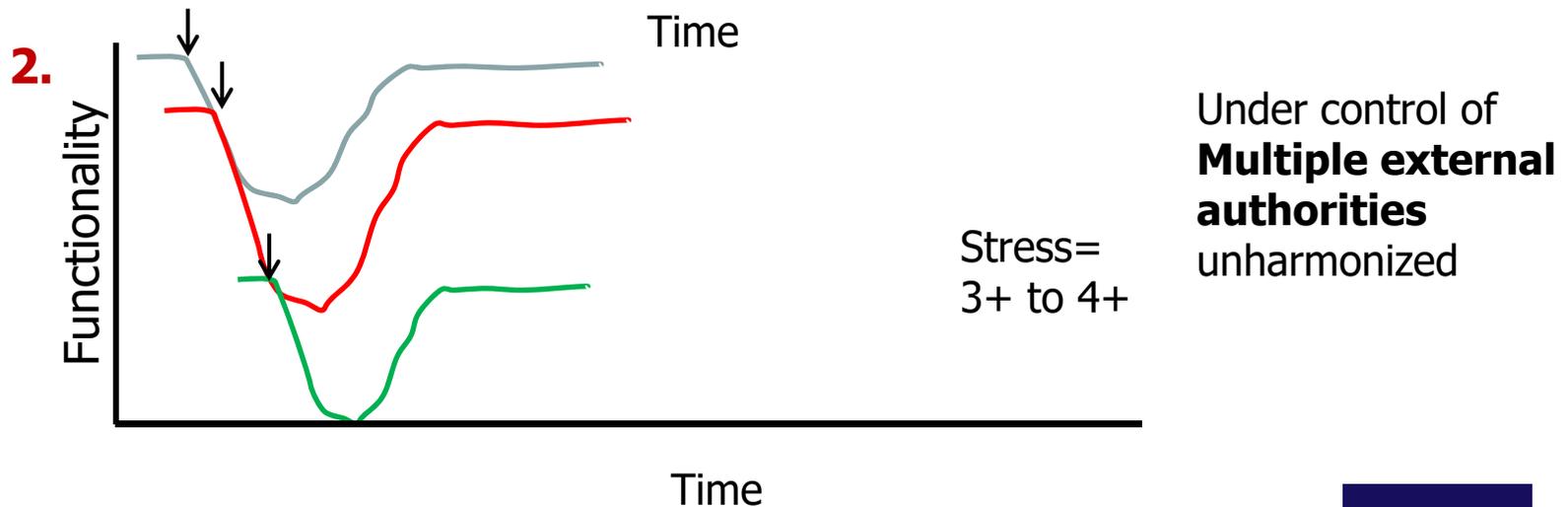
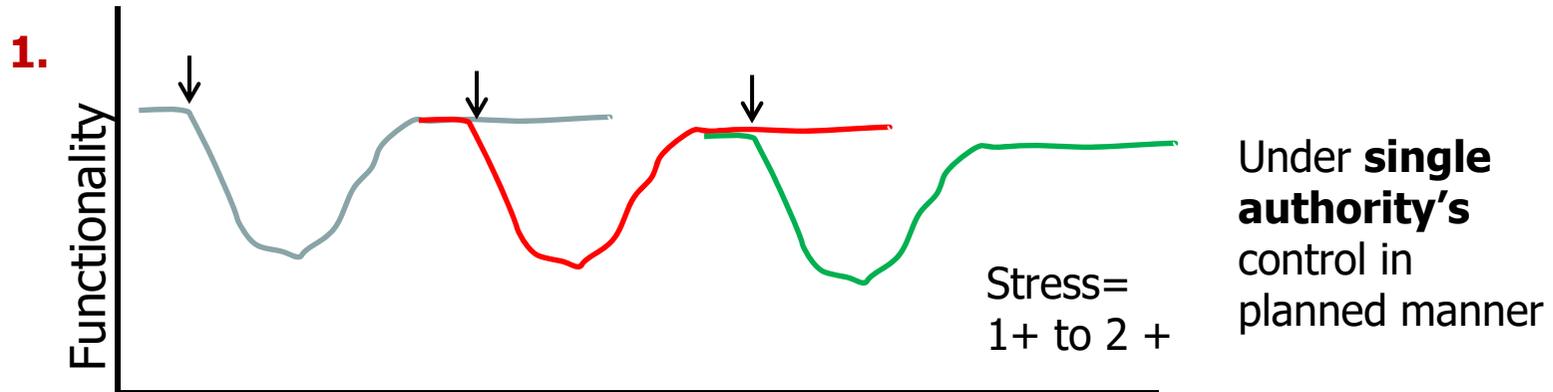
Multiple work stresses from uncoordinated sources
 Each small alone but incrementally accumulate.
 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6.....

→ ∞ Stress

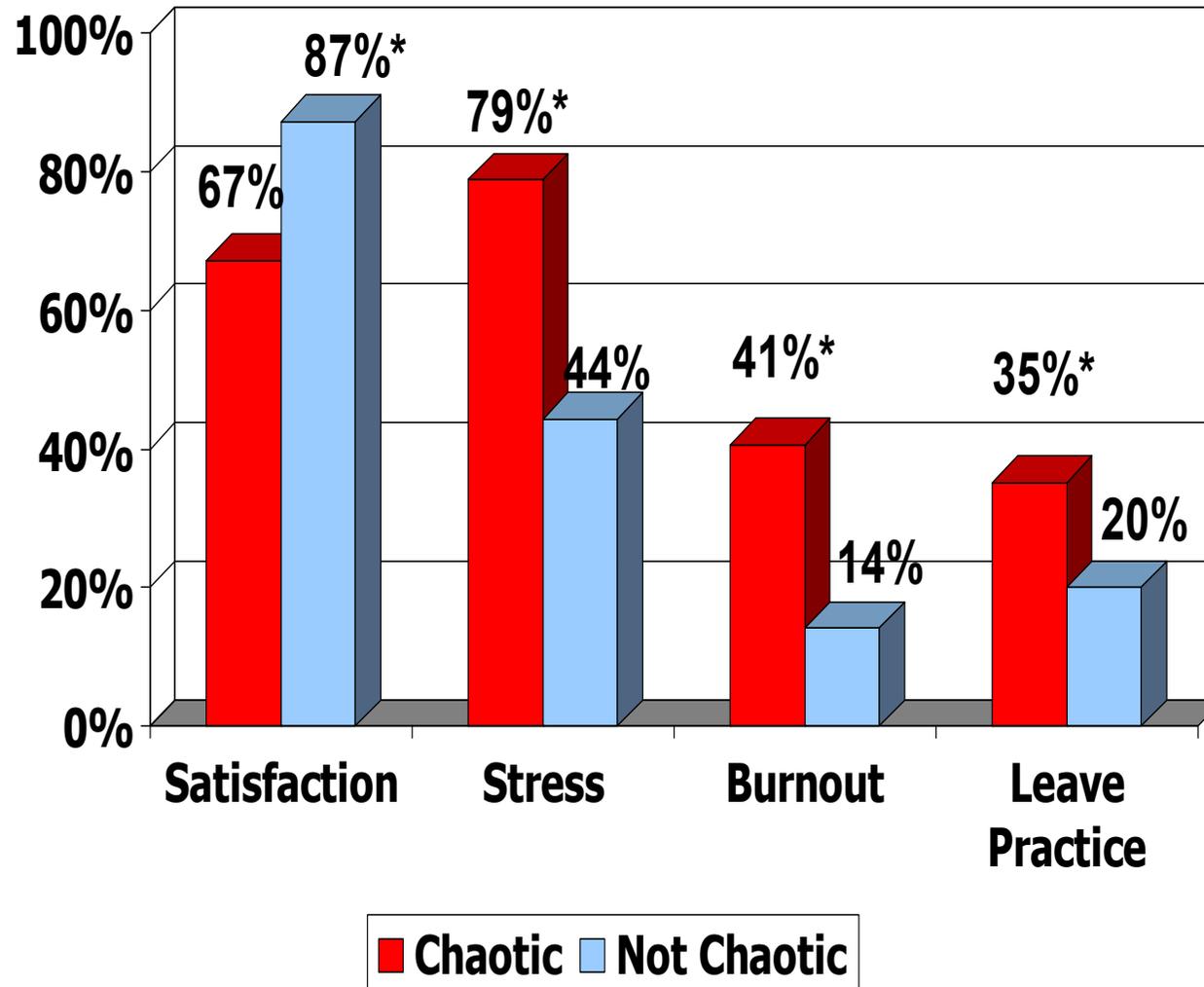
"Friendly Fire"
 "Enemy Fire"



Rate of Roll Out of New Initiatives: Learning curve functional recovery and stress



Work Environment Chaos and Physician Outcomes



Linzer M, et al. *Ann Intern Med* 2009;151:28-036

Treatment Strategies for Burnout

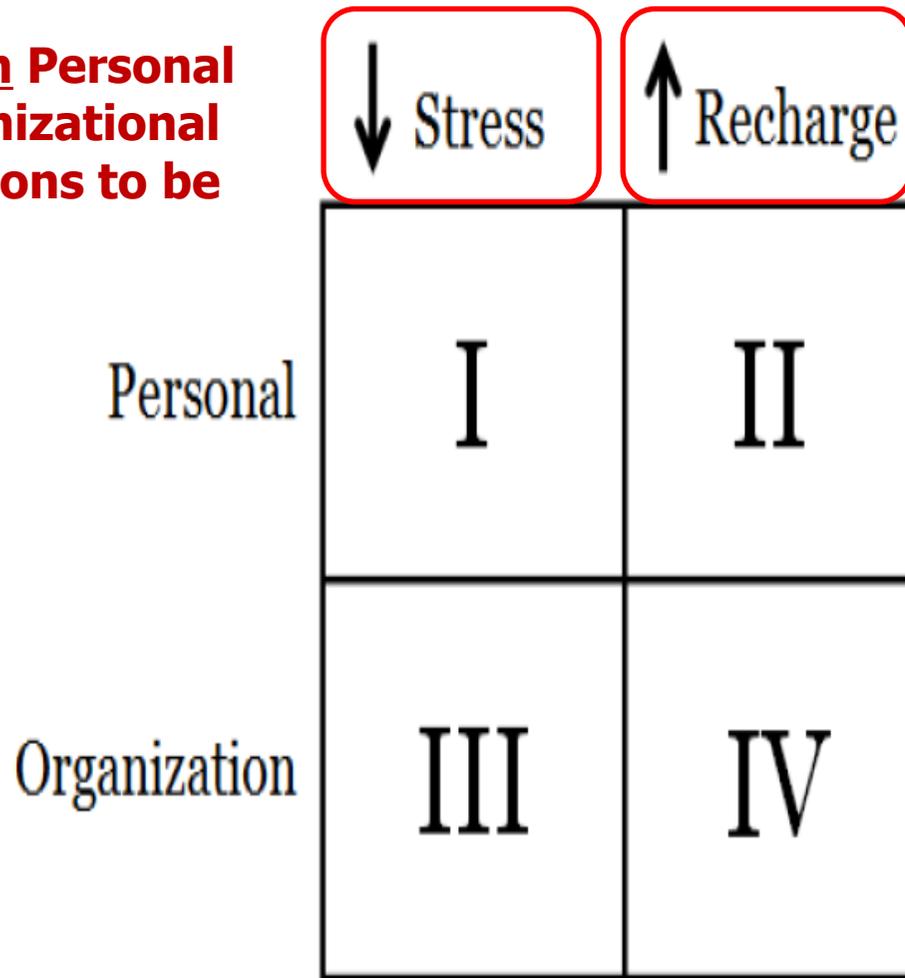
- Recognize the causes creating the personal situation
- Communicate with peers
- Develop hobbies and outside interests
- Ensure to recognize and enhance family relationships and support
- Increase the amount of rest BUT vacations are not a fix
- Alter work or career options if appropriate
- Develop a **Burnout Prevention Matrix**

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The Burnout Prevention Matrix

Need both Personal and Organizational interventions to be effective



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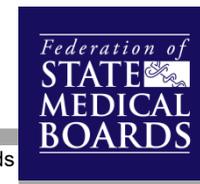
Personal Reduction of Stress (Quadrant I)

1. Mindfulness Based Stress Relief (MBSR), Mindful Practice
2. Squeegee Breath
3. Gratefulness Journaling
4. Narrative Medicine to vent past traumas in training and practice
5. Celebrate all wins ("treat yourself like a dog")
6. Acquire leadership, delegation and patient flow skills
7. Vision-Career alignment: What is your ideal patient encounter, procedures, ideal practice? Blue-sky vision. What do you need to do to get close to achieving it?
8. Ways of dealing with Upset Patients
9. Ways to master EMR
10. Three Good Things that happen each day (Duke, USF & Georgia Tech)
11. Personal Time management
12. E-mail grouping in batches during the day (e.g., 11:30 AM and 4:30 PM)
13. Re-think how much you need to document.
14. Stress reduction classes
15. Yoga
16. Employee Assistance Program
17. Personal Psychotherapy

Seven Essentials of Mindfulness

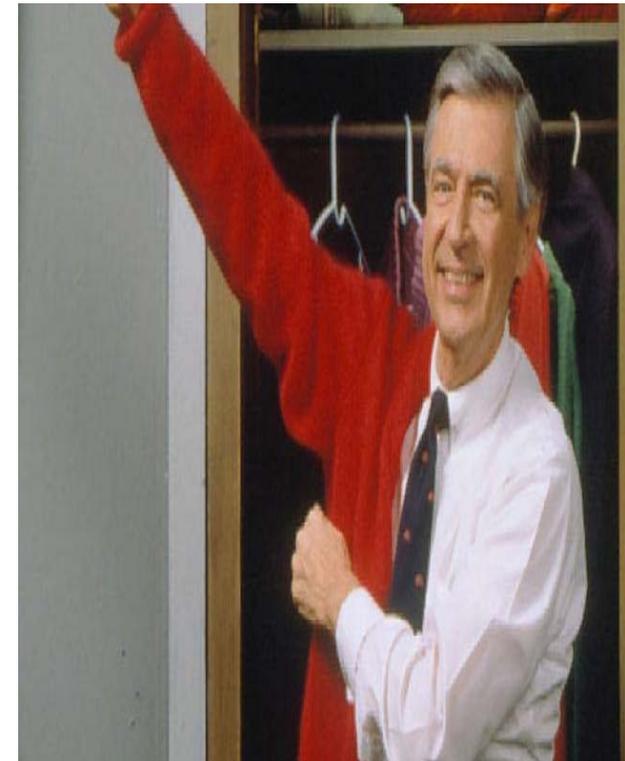
1. **Non-Judging:** impartial witness to your experience; observe w/o judging, editing or intellectualizing it
2. **Non-Striving:** no goal other than to be yourself
3. **Acceptance:** willingness to see things the way they are
4. **Letting Go:** of thoughts, ideas, things, pleasant and unpleasant
5. **Beginner's Mind:** free of expectations from past experience; breath as anchor to present moment
6. **Patience:** things must unfold in their own time
7. **Trust:** in yourself and your feelings; confidence that things can unfold in framework that embodies order and integrity

Kabat-Zinn, 2004



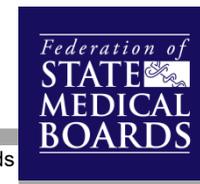
Personal Recharge (Quadrant II)

1. **Honoring Self**
2. **Boundary ritual between work and home**
 - ❑ Car ride home relaxing music, mindful breathing
 - ❑ Mr. Rogers routine (yeah, the sweater, the slippers !)
3. **Schedule the things you are going to do outside of work**
 - ❑ Get them on your calendar that you can see at work
4. **Recreation and Exercise**
 - ❑ Start small and sustainable -simple, frequent and fun
5. **Care for your body and its physical needs**
6. **Bucket List activities**
 - ❑ Write them down and start doing the list
7. **Regular Vacation**
 - ❑ Don't run yourself ragged before you decide to take off
8. **Spirituality**
 - ❑ Put work within the larger context

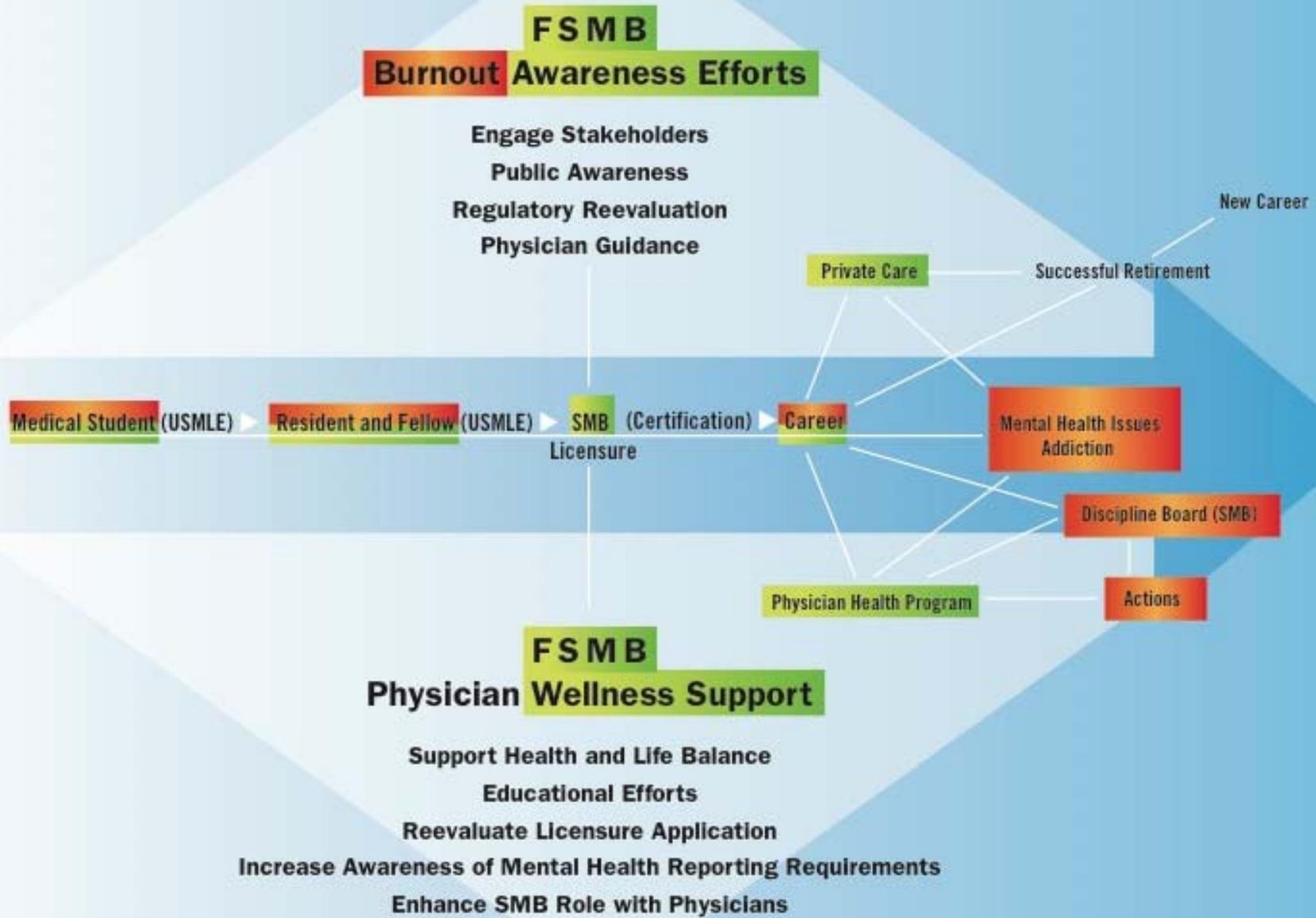


Potential Consequences of Burnout

- Situation goes unrecognized or ignored and not treated
- Depression and Mental Health Issues
- Deterioration in General Physical Health
- Risk of Increased Patient Care Errors and Safety
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Addiction
- Professional Misconduct and Discipline
 - Negligent or Incompetent Practice
 - Sexual Harassment or Boundary Issues
 - Fraudulent Practice Activities
 - Opioid Prescribing Infractions
- Impact on License
 - Probation and Monitoring
 - Suspension
 - Surrender of License
- Early retirement and/or Suicide



A Roadmap to **Burnout** and **Wellness**



Summary

- Ethical and professional behaviors are expected from medical professionals.
- Factors in life and environment put us all at risk
- Need to be vigilant to avoid errors that lead to consequences
- When recognize problems take care of yourself and seek appropriate help
- Health careers are under increasing pressure and burnout is real and a serious threat to you if ignored
- The **GOOD NEWS: MOST** physicians follow and maintain a proper path and enjoy their careers

Protecting Advocating Serving

Thank you!

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A Roadmap to Burnout and Wellness

