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Sleep Medicine

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Letter to the Editor

Re: Sørengaard TA, Saksvik-Lehouillier I. Associations between burnout symptoms and sleep among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sleep Med.* 2022 Feb;90:199–203



Dear Editor,

We applaud the recent publication by Sorengard and Saksvik-Lehouillier associating burnout symptoms with later sleep impairment among critical workforce [1]. We highlight the bidirectional nature of this relationship: impaired sleep also likely contributes to the evolution of and lasting impacts of burnout, especially among healthcare workers. Healthcare worker burnout was already seriously underappreciated and unmitigated before 2020, and has since soared [2], but reports of comprehensive, effective solutions are few.

Adequate sleep is key for performance, mental health, well-being, and recovery. Unfortunately, achieving adequate sleep has long been overlooked as an important lever in physician readiness to work. In 2020, American Academy of Sleep Medicine addressed the role of sleep in physician burnout [3], noting that sleep deprivation due to shift-work schedules, high workload, long hours, sleep interruptions, and insufficient recovery sleep has been implicated in the genesis and perpetuation of burnout. The additional burdens presented by the pandemic have compounded both sleep disturbances and burnout. Ongoing high service demands, a culture that undervalues sleep, a lack of boundaries between work and home life in the era of digital medicine, lack of attention to scheduling, biological vulnerabilities, and potential unrecognized sleep disorders may perpetuate burnout due to unhealthy or insufficient sleep.

Adequate sleep supports resilience of the physician workforce and plays a role in patient safety. We can no longer ignore protecting the health of critical workforces, and addressing sleep health is fundamental.

Conflict of interest

The ICMJE Uniform Disclosure Form for Potential Conflicts of Interest associated with this article can be viewed by clicking on the following link: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleep.2022.03.027>.

References

- [1] Sørengaard TA, Saksvik-Lehouillier I. Associations between burnout symptoms and sleep among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Sleep Med* 2022 Feb;90:199–203.
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