

Coaching as a Strategy to Reduce Burnout Among Healthcare Workers

10 Critical Ways Coaching can Make a Difference



Fatigue.

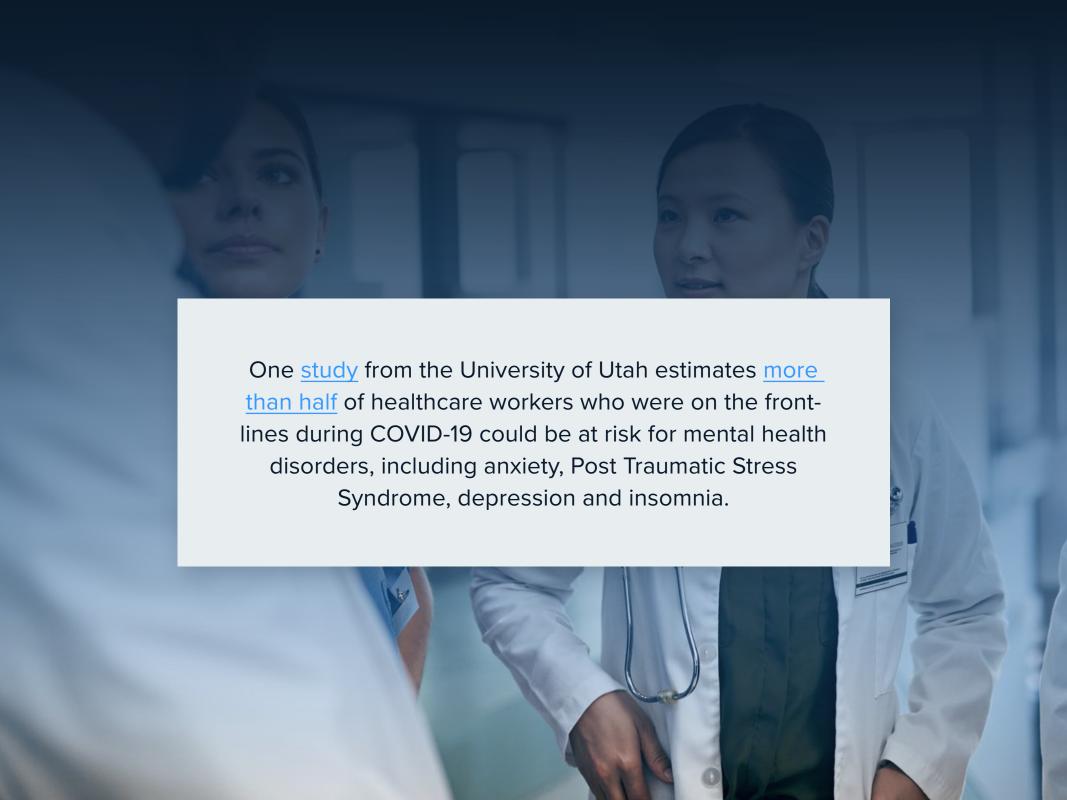
It's a term we've heard constantly since the COVID-19 pandemic started in March of 2020. We're tired of wearing masks. We've grown weary of putting off family gettogethers due to another outbreak. And the uncertainty brought upon by mutating variants — and when we'll again return to some form of normalcy — has been physically and emotionally draining.

Let's face it: we're exhausted.

But for healthcare workers, the pandemic has presented an even greater set of challenges. Doctors and nurses have been dealing with COVID-19 personally and professionally, facing the coronavirus at home and at work.

To say doctors and nurses are tired would be a gross understatement — **they're burnt out**. They've been working around the clock for the past two years as staffing shortages and illness upend their work and sense of self. Healthcare workers are leaving the profession left and right — the industry has lost nearly half a million workers since February of 2020 — but the toll that this period has taken has also led to darker outcomes, **including substance** abuse and other mental health issues.





Healthcare administrators are aware of the problem, but solutions aren't always easy to come by.

- How do hospitals retain their staff under these challenging circumstances?
- How can leaders boost morale when there's no obvious light at the end of the tunnel?

Burnt-out healthcare workers are a *risk* to patients and themselves.

When doctors are struggling to keep their heads above water professionally and emotionally, **it's impossible to provide superlative care.**

Executive coaching can mitigate the effects of physician burnout. By providing healthcare professionals with trusted confidents and mentors, hospitals can create a systemic culture change that increases employee morale and patient outcomes.

Studies have shown coaching to reduce levels of stress and burnout among physicians. The practice also **promotes** an **environment of self-care** that shows healthcare professionals they're being supported by their employers.





Burnout in Healthcare: *An Age-old Problem*

Healthcare workers have been struggling with burnout long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

In fact, it wasn't until 1989 with the passage of the <u>Libby Zion</u> <u>law</u> in New York that resident physicians in that state had to limit their work to 80 hours a week. The law was established after Libby Zion, a Vermont college student, died in the care of two young resident physicians, forcing policy makers to question whether doctors' overwork led to subpar, and sometimes dangerous, outcomes. Still today, there is nothing that restricts the number of hours that attending physicians are required to work.

BURNOUT IN HEALTHCARE: AN AGE-OLD PROBLEM

Burnout among physicians is almost <u>twice as prevalent</u> compared to those in other positions. A 1999 study – more than two decades before the 2020 pandemic – found that 43% of registered in-patient nurses had a <u>high degree of emotional exhaustion</u>.

"I think you could argue that burnout is **epidemic in healthcare**. Perhaps in society at large, but certainly disproportionally in healthcare."

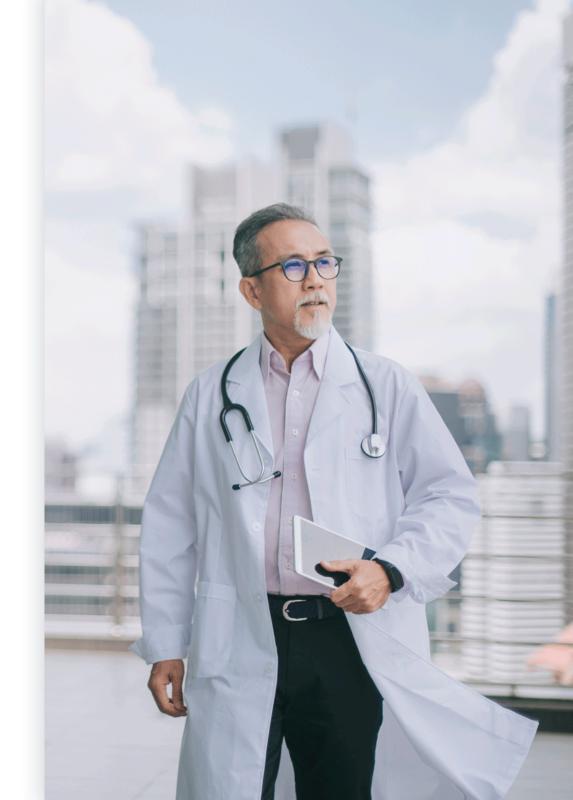
- DR. ROBERT S. SAWIN, Executive Coach at Marquis Leadership

But lately it hasn't just been that healthcare workers are overworked, although that's one culprit of burnout. Instead, most nurses and physicians have dealt with what's referred to as "moral injury" since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

BURNOUT IN HEALTHCARE: AN AGE-OLD PROBLEM

In its most basic sense, moral injury refers to healthcare providers having to make decisions that go against their long-held beliefs about quality care, creating a sort of cognitive dissonance that bears down on their psyche. A prime example during the pandemic is the inability to allow loved ones to visit their dying relatives: due to pandemic restrictions, doctors and nurses aren't allowed to let people into hospitals, even if that means barring relatives from saying one last goodbye.

This type of restriction puts healthcare workers in an extremely difficult predicament; while their main goal is to keep patients safe, it's heartbreaking to refuse someone a final visit. And after two years of dealing with situations like this, it can make a practitioner second guess themselves and the healthcare industry as a whole. Why am I doing this? What made me choose to give my life to this profession?





"The idea of moral injury is that whatever you're doing conflicts with something inside of you that made you become a healthcare worker."

- DR. CARLOS PELLEGRINI, Executive Coach at Marquis Leadership

Moral injury is a loss of control – it's the feeling that you're unable to live out your purpose as a doctor.

That loss of control is even harder on young doctors or incoming residents, who don't know a world before the COVID-19 pandemic. That's a serious problem when the United States is looking at a physician shortage of around 100,000 by 2034.



Where Coaching Comes In

So, what's the solution to burnt-out doctors and overworked young, resident physicians?

If the last two years have taught us anything, it's that workers are becoming more assertive about what they do and don't want in their professional lives. While remote work likely isn't an option for most healthcare professionals, the ability to ask their superiors for adequate support and a better culture is most definitely on the table.

WHERE COACHING COMES IN

Creating a strong and stable culture requires more than a **one-and-done solution**.

In order for doctors and nurses to heal — and feel as though they're regaining control of their work — hospitals and clinics need to devise an all-encompassing strategy that gets buy-in from the executive team. Creating a strong and stable culture requires more than a one-and-done solution; it calls for systemic change that is constantly examined and recalibrated as necessary.

Part of this strategic shift might include implementing rules on how often staff can work – maybe there's a limit on how many hours doctors can work each week. Another option could be offering on-site mental health services for all employees.



A <u>study</u> in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that physicians at the Mayo Clinic experienced a decrease in emotional exhaustion after six months of professional coaching. **Burnout dropped by 17% among study participants.**

Providing coaching to healthcare staff has been shown to be an effective tool in fighting burnout and increasing hospital efficiencies while also producing better patient outcomes. It gives healthcare professionals a fresh perspective on their work, prioritizing their duties while retaining a sense of pride and meaning in what they do.

WHERE COACHING COMES IN

Coaching is effective for a few reasons.

First, it allows healthcare professionals to share their challenges and vulnerabilities with an impartial confidant. In the medical field, doctors and other practitioners might feel that they're showing vulnerability by admitting burnout to their colleagues; coaching offers a way for them to be genuine without fearing judgement.

"Coaching enhances the ability of the healthcare professional to communicate more effectively, to build trust, and to develop stronger relationships with co-workers, friends, and family. These connections are a source of resilience, a deterrent to burnout, and one of the most important sources of satisfaction and happiness. Improving emotional intelligence to facilitate the development of better relationships is at the center of what we coaches do."

- DR. PELLEGRINI

"When you're feeling overwhelmed, when you're feeling the anxiety and feeling burnt out, it's not easy to weigh the options. You need to have somebody who's objective, who's separate from it all."

— GLEN STEWART, Marquis Leadership Founder

A coach can also help doctors with boundary setting. Being an objective observer, a healthcare coach can offer suggestions on how to manage workloads and create a situation that allows the provider to engage in more of the work that they're passionate about.

An added benefit to coaching is that healthcare workers will be more likely to open up with coaches who have worked in the medical profession. Often times, healthcare coaches have experience as doctors, nurses or surgeons, and can relate to the stress that comes with the job.

"Having a sense of community is key, making sure doctors feel like they're not in this alone. Coaches give you that confidant to talk with about really challenging things."



Here are *10 critical ways* coaches help healthcare teams

- 1. ACTING AS A CONFIDANT
- 2. SETTING BOUNDARIES
- 3. FOCUSING ON PASSIONS
- 4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- 5. BUILDING UPON UNIQUE STRENGTHS

- 6. COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY
- 7. MANAGING CONFLICT
- 8. NAVIGATING CHANGE
- 9. BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS
- 10. HELPING HEALTHCARE WORKERS SAY "NO"

They act as a *confidant*.

Healthcare workers need a fresh set of ears – it's helpful for them to convey their challenges and fears with an impartial coach. Coaching allows physicians to have a confidant they can turn to other than colleagues or family members.

"You don't have to go home and talk to your significant other. You don't have to talk to your peers or your teammates or supervisor. Coaching provides you with an independent confidant and sounding board where you can think out loud and be more intentional about what you do next."

- GLEN STEWART





They help set **boundaries**.

Healthcare workers are extremely overworked.

With to-do lists that stretch multiple pages, they feel trapped in their daily obligations. A coach can help healthcare professionals better manage their time and find ways to engage with the parts of their job they value most.

They allow healthcare workers to *focus on their passions*.

Doctors and nurses didn't get into healthcare to fill out paperwork – they joined the medical field to fulfill their passion of helping others. An effective coach will allow physicians to step back and devise a plan that lets them work on more of what they love.



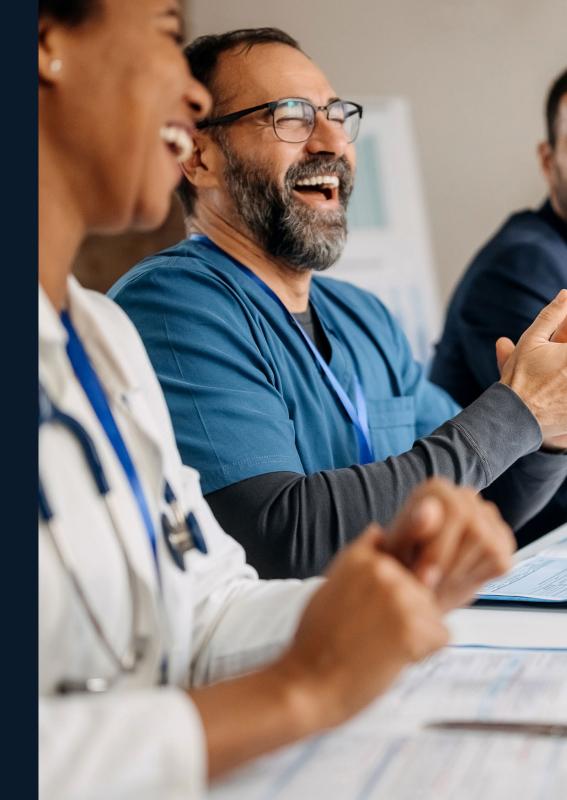


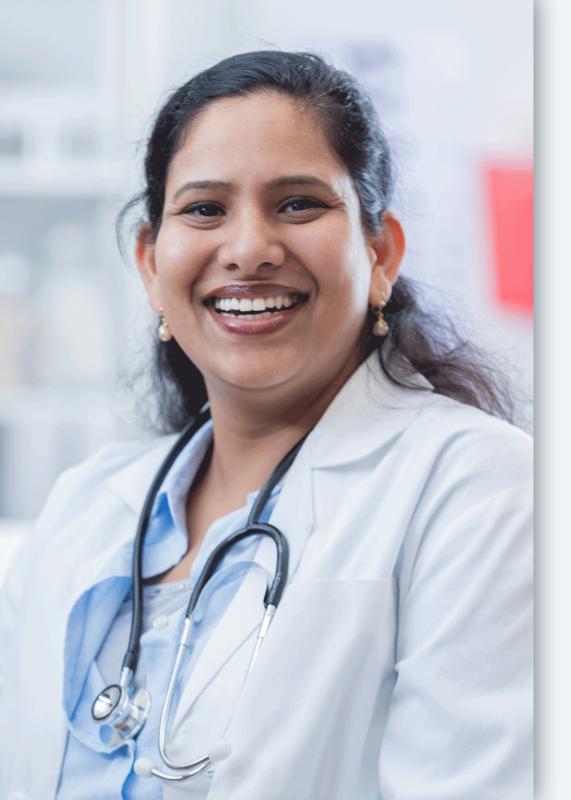
They help healthcare workers *develop professionally*.

Not all stress healthcare professionals experience is brought on by the demands of working in the medical field. In some instances, they're in need of career advice and guidance. Working with a coach can provide healthcare professionals the emotional support and direction needed to make the next step in their career.

They build on and develop healthcare workers' *unique strengths*.

Healthcare workers are talented professionals who are passionate about their work. Working with a coach can help physicians and other practitioners hone their unique skills and develop plans on how to best deploy them. By harnessing these skills, healthcare professionals can better serve themselves, their colleagues and their patients.





They help healthcare workers communicate effectively.

Effective communication is integral to healthy interpersonal relationships — and the fight against burnout. Coaches work with clients to develop their emotional intelligence and gain the confidence necessary to be a successful communicator in the workplace. This leads to greater satisfaction among clients and their colleagues.

They help manage through *conflict*.

Conflict arises on a daily basis in the medical field – time constraints, miscommunication and rigorous demands wear on doctors and nurses. Often times, this friction builds up to a point that leaves healthcare workers feeling dejected and helpless. Coaches arrange a plan of action for healthcare workers – whether to solve conflict among colleagues or general workplace issues – that can lessen the burden created by the everyday pressures of working in a healthcare setting.





They help healthcare workers *navigate change*.

Change is ever-present in any professional environment – and it's a major part of working in healthcare. Coaches can help clients devise strategies to navigate a changing workplace and offer approaches to help healthcare workers thrive in a dynamic work setting.

They help build *high-performing* teams.

Effective coaches know that employee wellness needs to be embedded into an organization's culture. By offering the support of a coach, hospitals and clinics are creating a system that supports its workers and promotes a community of trust and encouragement. The better off healthcare professionals are, the more high-performing they – and their teams – will be.





They help healthcare workers' say "no."

Too often, healthcare professionals are overworked and struggle to turn down requests from colleagues and their superiors. A good coach can help clients devise strategies to be more assertive and say no.

Providing the Healing Healthcare Professionals Need

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with healthcare burnout. But by implementing an all-encompassing plan to better serve medical professionals, hospital administrators can make strides in the right direction.

"There's no one explanation for why people are suffering from burnout. It's a multitude of issues... the solutions may differ for each individual and in each institution or situation."

- DR. SAWIN

PROVIDING THE HEALING HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS NEED

Coaching has the potential to change physicians' outlook and therefore increase medical efficacy and patient outcomes.

Our healthcare providers are a valued asset, and they deserve all the support they can get during an unprecedented period that's proven to be incredibly challenging for our doctors, nurses and other practitioners. These are the people we entrust with our health and that of our loved ones. We expect them to provide healing when we need it most.

But it's important to realize that they're also in need of healing – coaching provides an opportunity to impart the same support they so often offer us.

Featured Coaches



Carlos Pellegrini MD, FACS

Dr. Pellegrini is a surgeon with expertise on surgical education, simulation, professionalism, and leadership.

Executive Coach
Organizational Consultant
Keynote Speaker



Robert Sawin MD, FAAP, FACS

Dr. Sawin is an accredited physician and healthcare leader with over 20 years of industry experience.

Executive Coach
Organizational Consultant
Keynote Speaker



Glen Stewart

Glen Stewart is an accomplished executive coach and organizational development professional with extensive leadership expertise.

Marquis CEO
Executive Coach
Facilitator
Keynote Speaker

MEET THE MARQUIS TEAM



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