

CONFIDENTIAL

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Editor's Note: The life of a resident is filled with stress, which may only become apparent when it begins to cause serious problems at work or at home. In this two-part series, you'll learn how to become more attuned to the warning signs of stress, before a crisis occurs. In the next issue, experts provide advice on dealing with stress.

How to Recognize the Signs of Stress in Yourself and Those Around You

"Learning how to take care of patients and realizing that one's orders have real impact on what occurs can create a tremendous amount of stress," says James Martin, M.D., president of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

As program director for the Family Practice Residency Program at CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care in San Antonio, Texas, Martin deals with residents every day and has learned to recognize when medical residents become overstressed.

"In post-graduate training, young doctors perform many different procedures, make decisions and have to communicate with patients and their families. And there's a learning curve—sometimes doctors haven't spent a lot of time learning communication skills, including how to read body language. So doctors worry, 'will I say and do the

right thing?' and there's a lot of self-pressure to do well."

The Workload Factor

With medical residents putting in 80-hour work weeks, there's a huge potential for sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion, says Martin. "That's incredibly stressful by itself, and it leaves so little time for other priorities—faith, family and personal fun time. So we find young doctors struggling with the question, 'How can I be the kind of doctor I want to be, and balance that with my other life priorities?'"

Emotions, Behavior are Clues

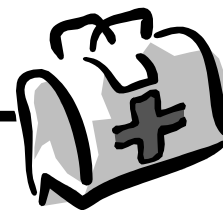
"One of the first stress indicators we notice is hyper-emotionalism," says Martin. "People will overreact to a situation, or cry when interacting with patients or staff, and display anger and frustration more visibly. They tend to be much more impatient with the health care system."

For immediate help with stress-related problems, your first resource is the Resident Assistance Program Hotline, 813-870-3344.

Stress can show up in a number of ways, and even medical professionals may not recognize it in themselves. But when stress or other challenges of your residency begin to make you feel out of sorts or out of control, RAP, offered by Wood & Associates is as close as your phone.

"We see stress show up as increased agitation and irritability, and often others notice mood changes before the stressed person does," says Patricia N. Alexander, Ph.D., a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, whose clients include medical residents, law enforcement professionals and others in high-stress occupations.

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In health there is freedom. Health is the first of all liberties.

Henri-Frederic Amiel

1828 – 1881

What topics would you like to see in RAP? Contact the editor by e-mail: patricianalexander@earthlink.net



Money Matters

Coping with the Stress of Debt

Practically everyone with debts experiences some type of stress. In fact, unless your income is growing much faster than your debts and interest, the stress is likely to increase. What can be done?

First things first

Decide to do something about the debt that's causing your stress. Tell yourself, "today is the day I'm going to begin taking control of my financial situation."

Start small if you're feeling overwhelmed

The next step is to actually *do something* about the situation, no matter how slight it is. It could be talking to a friend, putting all your bills in order, locking up—or better yet, cutting up—your credit cards, or saving \$10.00. That action will help you focus on making a change for the better.

Be informed about your options

If your situation's reached the point that you're receiving calls from creditors, it's time to educate yourself about your rights as a debtor and the many options available to you.

Watch for more on reducing debt-related stress in the next issue. In the meantime, you may find these sites helpful:

www.bbbonline.org
www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/pubs/credit/fdc.htm
www.consumercredit.com

By Julio C. Muniz, Muniz and Associates, Tampa, Florida, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and a Chartered Life Underwriter

Signs of Stress, continued

"Stress can show up as a tendency toward apathy, and very often tardiness or absenteeism becomes an issue," adds Martin. "These are some signs we can recognize in a colleague. We also take notice if a resident begins to perform poorly academically, or mentions marital or family stress, because that can indicate they're not dealing with stress well."

When people are stressed, it affects their interpersonal relationships, says Alexander. It can also lower their energy levels and reduce their ability to concentrate, which can be especially dangerous in a hospital setting. "People may also not recognize that there's also a link between stress and risk-taking behavior. Overspending, gambling, speeding, drinking, drug use and infidelity are examples of how some people try to diffuse high levels of stress."

At home, stressed medical residents may isolate themselves, by spending time in front of the TV or the computer, and not being engaged in activities at home, says Alexander. They may also experience sleep disturbances or unusual weight changes.

Stress comes with the territory for medical residents, but there's a lot of hope—and help—available to you. Watch for part two of this series for expert advice, and remember your Resident Assistance Program is just a phone call away.

Early Warning Signs of Job Stress

Headache
Sleep disturbances
Difficulty in concentrating
Short temper
Upset stomach

Job Stress and Health: What the Research Tells Us

- Psychologically demanding jobs that allow employees little control over the work process can increase the risk of **cardiovascular disease**.
- On the basis of research by NIOSH and many other organizations, it is widely believed that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity **musculoskeletal disorders**.
- Several studies suggest that differences in rates of **mental health problems** (such as depression and burnout) for various occupations are due partly to differences in job stress levels. (Economic and lifestyle differences between occupations may also contribute to some of these problems.)
- Although more study is needed, there is a growing concern that stressful working conditions interfere with safe work practices and set the stage for **injuries at work**.
- Some studies suggest a relationship between stressful working conditions and **health problems** including suicide, cancer, ulcers, and impaired immune function. However, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Source: *Encyclopaedia of Occupational Safety and Health*
www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html