



Implant Game Changers

A Whitepaper Series By Roger P. Levin, DDS

Implant Game Changers is a monthly whitepaper on an important implant practice management topic. It provides you with a quick and easy way to understand a specific business challenge and how to translate the solution into higher production and profit, greater efficiency, more implant patients, lower stress and greater personal satisfaction.

Is There Burnout in Your Practice?

According to the World Health Organization burnout is not a medical condition, but an occupational situation. What most specialists don't understand is that burnout isn't simply stress, anxiety, or fatigue. These conditions can often be overcome with a day off or some relaxing activity. Burnout is different and often has a significant impact on the performance of a specialty practice.

What is Burnout?

Burnout is a real and identified syndrome. It occurs when team members are under long-term or repeated stress or high anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic set the stage for many specialists and specialty team members to experience true burnout. This resulted in doctors and team members who became disenfranchised, disconnected, and unhappy in their practices. Over time, they were going to work and experiencing a robotic version of Groundhog Day. Days became something to get through with high levels of fatigue accompanied by burnout. Interestingly, burnout at work does not always reflect burnout in a personal life. There are doctors who were literally miserable going to work and yet bounced back emotionally and physically at the end of the day or on weekends. Burnout can be situational, and it is usually related to the workplace.

For the first time burnout is having a significantly negative effect on specialty practice production and performance. There are practices that simply cannot staff properly to carry out the day-to-day operations and services necessary to maintain specific levels of production and profitability. There are even practices that have had to reduce the number of hours or patients seen due to these staffing issues as some team members decided to leave the practice during the COVID-19 shutdown and did not return during the reopening.

We have also spoken to many specialists that became interested in selling their practices because they were literally burnt out. They did not want to go to work and deal with the issues, leadership, patient related factors, or even the level of services.

Avoiding burnout

The best way to treat burnout is to avoid it. Avoiding it means taking the steps to create a practice that allows the specialist to focus on three things: patient care, patient relations, and referrals. The rest of the day-to-day operations should be handled by a well-organized team that is highly trained to carry out their jobs.

Levin Group's 30-year ongoing study of the top 10% of specialty practices helped to identify 17 principles that these practices generally have in common. One of those principles is a focus on high team longevity. If the team remains with the practice long-term, knows and understands their jobs, and can hit their targets, it takes enormous pressure off the doctor. It also creates true engagement for team members who understand their jobs. Instead of feeling like they are being pulled in multiple directions due to chaos day after day, they will feel that they are contributing to both the practice and the lives of patients.

Another shared characteristic of top 10% of practices is a strong and highly skilled office manager. We often find when talking to doctors who are frustrated or on the verge of burnout that they have an office manager who isn't qualified for the job. Practices often place long-term trusted team members into the office manager position even though they're unqualified. There was a book written decades ago called *The Peter Principle*. It outlined the concept that employees are often promoted until they reach their level of incompetence. This often happens in specialty practices because we promote a person that we trust into a position that they cannot truly handle. In other practices, the office manager is qualified for the position, but the specialty practice grows while the office manager fails to grow with it. Either production is significantly higher with more staff members, additional partners and offices, or new services and marketing programs are introduced. Many office managers can grow through education and skill building as the practice develops, but many cannot. Top practices typically have a strong and highly skilled office manager who can handle what we refer to as the toughest job in the office.

We think of office managers having the toughest job because he or she must manage both up and down. Managing up means managing the doctor and managing down means managing the team. Of course, the office manager must also handle all day-to-day operations, running every aspect of the practice other than clinical care, and acting as a buffer between the doctor and the rest of the team. Specialists will still want to lead their team, creating optimism, inspiration and motivation, but specialists should not be managing any aspect of the team day-to-day. All questions and decisions that are not clinical should be addressed by the office manager. Hopefully, the team will literally make 98% of all daily decisions with only a few being brought to the office manager or doctor to gain direction.

A practice with a long-term team and a strong office manager will often avoid burnout as well as anxiety, stress or fatigue. Conversely, the wrong office manager will often cause high levels of team turnover resulting in a constant upheaval on the team that can lead to chaos and burnout.

Burnout stops referral marketing

When a specialist becomes truly burnt out, one of the first activities to be affected is referral marketing. Specialty practices need referrals to maintain the targeted levels of production, profitability, and income. Consider the time when a specialist begins in practice, there is a huge energy around meeting and greeting referring doctors and beginning to build a referral base. This can go on for several years and then typically begins to slow down as a specialty practice becomes busier and the life of the specialist becomes hectic as well. However, by putting in place a professional relations coordinator (PRC), the marketing program can continue to be very strong, and referrals can be maintained or increased.

A specialty practice that doesn't have PRC to carry out the referral marketing program leaves all the burden on the specialist. If the specialist moves toward a burnout phase, then referral marketing will suffer. There will simply be no motivation, momentum, or energy remaining for building and

maintaining relationships with referring doctors. This can often lead to a downturn in practice performance, which will intensify the burnout.

We suggest that every specialty practice have a PRC who is trained to handle almost all the referral marketing program. It is a job that is just as important as having an assistant, an implant treatment coordinator, a front desk staff member, or an office manager. It is a position that should be a standard part of every practice and will help to avoid fatigue, stress, anxiety, or burnout.

Take care of yourself

You must keep in mind that none these strategies will work if you don't take care of yourself both physically and mentally. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Treat your body right.** Getting enough sleep, exercise, and healthy food are all solutions for so many things, including burnout.
- **Take time to turn off.** Whether it's a long vacation, or a few days off, any relaxation activity will help.
- **Re-identify your practice purpose or mission.** When people come to work each day with a sense of purpose, they are less likely to reach burnout.
- **Talk to someone.** Talking to others that can offer feedback, guidance, and compassion will make a big difference in how well and how quickly burnout can be reversed.
- **See a professional.** If the burnout is severe, it may make sense to speak to a physician about the situation. They deal with this regularly and have excellent recommendations, especially after they understand the individual situation.

The better an individual takes care of themselves, the better they will be able to move through a burnout phase. Keep in mind the burnout can either be a physical or emotional scenario or both.

Take care of your team

It's also important for the specialist to watch for burnout amongst team members. At the earliest signs begin open communication with the team member to learn how the practice can support them. Solutions may include a vacation, or a decrease in workload or hours until the person adjusts to their current circumstances. It's important to address any aspect of burnout for the individual to move back into a more positive optimistic state of mind.

It's also important to display optimism around your team. As a leader, bringing relentless optimism to the practice every day, will inspire the people around you. The more optimistic the leader is, the more optimistic and positive the team will become. Sometimes burnout can be avoided just by having a leader who communicates a sense of purpose, appreciation and compassion.

Summary

It takes time to reach burnout, and it takes time to move through it. The first step is identifying that burnout has occurred. Once there is a realization that burnout is happening then you can use the recommendations above to get through it.

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