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Burnt: A Narrative Exploration of Burnout in Medicine  
Aaron Chambers

Burnout has become a central social issue within the culture of medicine. Estimates project that more than half of all physicians experience burnout in a given year. This results in lower job satisfaction among physicians as well as diminished patient outcomes. The topic's literature suggests that burnout susceptibility is multifactorial, but includes extrinsic (debt, variable schedule, hierarchical workplace, EMR) as well as intrinsic (uncertainty, breaking difficult news, secondary trauma) contributors. To better understand this complicated topic, this project sought to synthesize competing factors within a narrative that explores the good and bad of contemporary medicine. The narrative is informed by direct observation and interviews with physicians and medical students. This has resulted in the deliverable form of a novel based on the episodic experiences of a PGY-1 in a busy urban hospital. This character is representative of a specific cul-de-sac or burnout. PGY-1 interns were found to have particularly high rates of emotional exhaustion. Emergency Departments have the highest rate of burnout among hospital staff. At present, a primitive draft of the project has been completed. After further discussion and interviewing, a subsequent outline was made to ensure key trigger-points were included within the story, including: medical mistakes, pharmacologic seeking patients and the results of difficult personalities within the medical world. At present, two revised chapters have been completed. Fiction was chosen for this project because of its unique ability to place the reader within a character's headspace. While the contributing factors of burnout exceed any narrative's capacity, storytelling allows for the interaction and compounding of these factors to be explored in a meaningful way. This work aspires to build understanding and empathy around the topic of physician burnout using one person's story.