

Battling burnout in healthcare

Are you leading from the front?

By Anna Fitch Courie, Director, Responder Wellness, FirstNet® Program at AT&T

About a year before I left my job with the U.S. Army, a General Officer I had known died right after retiring. I wish I could say this was the only tragic story of a great leader dying after giving their time and talent to take care of their people. But it's not.

Those in such high-stress careers as healthcare have a lower life expectancy than the general population. Leadership in healthcare can be exponentially more stressful. Emotional stress, burnout, and post-traumatic stress are becoming increasingly common amongst nurses. This also means suicide rates are climbing.^{1,2,3} Some things you can do to help change that?

- **Lead from the front:** You know the health of your people is vital to your organization, the safety of your patients, and the satisfaction of both nurses and patients. You will be a better leader if you set the example by taking care of your health.
- **Set the example:** Your subordinates are watching. They want to see your deeds match your words. Junior nurses who don't see you prioritize your own health will find it tough to take their own mental and physical health seriously.
- **Remember your purpose:** Reflect on why you became a nurse. Odds are you did it out of a desire to serve, heal and make a difference. You're not in your position by accident. Use it to drive the transformation you want to see.
- **Get your checkups:** The effects of chronic stress and shift work, coupled with a poor diet, lead toward a high mortality rate associated with cardiovascular disease.⁴ If you're not taking care of yourself, you will be more prone

to injury and illness. Getting regular checkups lets you keep an eye on those risk factors.

Don't put off healthy habits until you retire or "have more time." You want to age with grace and verve. And this is your chance to shift a disturbing trend where hard-working, dedicated leaders give their all and then die of a heart attack.

You'll see a personal benefit—and your organization will as well.

Check out firstnet.com/healthandwellness for resources to support the wellness of first responders, frontline healthcare workers and those who support them. =

FirstNet and the FirstNet logo are registered trademarks and service marks of the First Responder Network Authority. All other marks are the property of their respective owners.

Dr. Anna Fitch Courie, DNP, RN, PHNA-BC, Director, Responder Wellness with the FirstNet Program at AT&T, holds a Bachelor's in Nursing from Clemson University; a Master's in Nursing Education from the University of Wyoming; and a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree from Ohio State University.

References

- 1 Shanafelt TD, Hasan O, Dyrbye LN, Sinsky C, Satele D, Sloan J, West CP. Changes in burnout and satisfaction with work-life balance in physicians and the general US working population between 2011 and 2014. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2015;90(12):1600-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2015.08.023>
- 2 Iacovides A, Fountoulakis KN, Kaprinis S, Kaprinis G. The relationship between job stress, burnout and clinical depression. *J Affect Disord.* 2003;75(3):209-21. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0327\(02\)00101-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0327(02)00101-5)
- 3 Glasberg AL, Eriksson S, Norberg A. Burnout and 'stress of conscience' among healthcare personnel. *J Adv Nurs.* 2007; 57(4):392-403. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04111.x>
- 4 McKeon G, Steel Z, Wells R, Newby JM, Hadzi-Pavlovic D, Vancampfort D, Rosenbaum S. Mental health informed physical activity, for first responders and their support partners: a protocol for a stepped wedge evaluation of an online, code-signed intervention. *BMJ Open.* 2019;9(9):e030668 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33885376/>

This article was supplied to *American Nurse Journal* by FirstNet and did not undergo peer review.