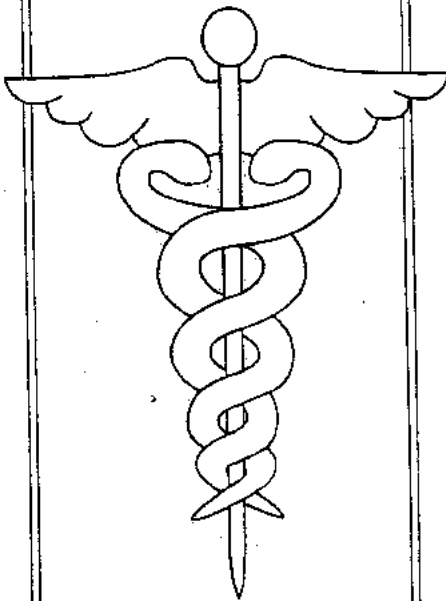


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Stress Management and the Prevention of Burnout

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STRESS MANAGEMENT AND THE PREVENTION OF BURNOUT

STRESS

Everyone experiences stress, which is exhaustion caused by long term exposure to emotionally demanding situations. Stress involves mental, emotional, and physical reactions to demands and changes.

Stress reactions can occur in response to both positive and negative events. Even a long-awaited event such as a marriage produces stress as the newlyweds adjust to a new life. A new job, no matter how much an individual has been looking forward to it, causes stress as the individual learns new things and adjusts to new circumstances.

In the workplace, stress may come from worry about losing a job or feelings of being trapped in a job due to financial fears. Stress may also result if a nursing assistant does not feel that he or she is accomplishing anything positive on the job.

BURNOUT

Burnout occurs when stress exhausts an individual physically, emotionally, and mentally. Symptoms of burnout include:

- ❖ physical tiredness.
- ❖ unhappiness with a job.
- ❖ feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.
- ❖ a negative self-concept.
- ❖ development of negative attitudes toward:
 - work.
 - people involved in the work.
 - life itself.

Physical symptoms of burnout include low energy levels and increased illness. The physically exhausted individual may also have headaches, muscle tension, and eating and sleeping problems.

Emotional exhaustion involves feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and being trapped. In extreme cases, the individual may have thoughts of suicide.

When individuals are mentally exhausted, they develop negative attitudes toward themselves, their work, and life itself.

Job burnout is a serious problem. Statistics show that more individuals die of heart attacks on Monday mornings between the hours of 8 and 9 a.m. than any other time. Stress occurs in most employees at one time or another, but most people with stress do not have heart attacks on the job.

CAUSES

One of the causes of burnout is the human need to find meaning in life. Nursing assistants may feel that they are doing the same thing every day and that their hard work is not appreciated. This, along with the stress of the job and personal problems, may lead to burnout.

Burnout occurs in hard workers who care about their jobs. Nursing assistants who want to help people and make a difference in residents' lives may find the job frustrating at times.

BLAME

Individuals are likely to blame their feelings about their work on themselves. They feel that they are somehow weak or inadequate, and this is why they are not able to handle work situations. Since many individuals hide these feelings of exhaustion and resentment about their jobs, they may also feel that they are alone.

SOLUTIONS

It is not hard to recognize the signs of burnout in others, but most of the time, it is difficult to see them in yourself. Recognizing these signs is the first step towards managing the problem.

Becoming aware of the symptoms of burnout and taking action can help an individual avoid drawbacks of the workplace. Burnout is not caused by an individual, but by the job situation. Nursing assistants may feel helpless to improve job conditions or to improve their residents' health; however, this is not a deficit in the nursing assistant. It is the nature of the job.

If you think you are starting to burn out, change your focus from "What's wrong with me?" to "What can I do about the situation?" Learn to use the energy you use to hide your symptoms and deal with your frustration in positive ways.

Take time to slow down during the day, using any break time to relax. Breathe deeply if you find yourself becoming frustrated. Think of how valuable your job is to residents and their families, and remember to praise other coworkers for their hard work.

Off the job, get regular exercise and make certain your meals are nutritious. Getting enough sleep and taking time to have fun helps you to work better.

SUMMARY

Nursing assistants' jobs are often stressful. They may feel that they work hard but do not make a difference in residents' lives, and that their work is not appreciated. Try to change your feelings about your job, understanding that your job is difficult but necessary for the health and well-being of residents. Remember that you cannot make residents well, but you can make them more comfortable and make them feel that someone cares.

Change your attitude about your job, realizing that your feelings of frustration come from the situation and not from any lack in yourself. Take time for breaks in the day when possible and take care of yourself.

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