

Healthcare AI

98% of clinicians say they've experienced feelings of burnout. But how would they prevent it?

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New research suggests burnout is an almost universal experience for healthcare professionals. HIMSS and Nuance surveyed 400+ doctors and nurses in ten different countries, to discover the factors pushing them beyond their limits and the solutions they would like to see. Explore the study's key findings and hear from the contributing clinicians.

For years now, pressure on the world's healthcare professionals has been mounting—with aging populations, increased documentation requirements, and then a global pandemic.

In this new study, HIMSS and Nuance explored the impact on clinicians in several countries around the world. It found that—while causes and levels may differ—clinician burnout is an almost universal experience.

98% of those who participated in Nuance and HIMSS' online survey said they had experienced feelings of burnout. When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on exhaustion or overload, 88% of respondents agreed it had exacerbated the issue.

HIMSS also conducted telephone interviews with doctors and nurses in 10 different countries, seeking to better understand their perspectives on burnout, its root causes, and its potential solutions.

We share some of the key findings below, but to explore the clinician's responses in-depth—and get HIMSS' conclusions and action points—we would recommend you [download the complete white paper](#).

What drives clinician burnout? What the clinicians said...

From a lack of control over their working days, to payment models, the clinicians that HIMSS surveyed identified a broad range of factors contributing to the build-up of stress and professional overload.

It's this stress and overload that, when excessive and persistent, lead to the symptoms we associate with clinician burnout—feelings of exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, reduced professional efficacy.

“COVID has obviously massively increased the level of stress and work that clinicians have had to do.”

Dr Afzal Chaudhry, Director of Digital, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UK

One key factor highlighted by HIMSS research is the scale of healthcare workloads. A [study](#) of employees at the University of Zaragoza in Spain has associated weekly workloads of over 40 hours with a greater risk of “frenetic” burnout; 55% of the doctors and 43% of the nurses involved in Nuance and HIMSS' online survey stated that they were exceeding this threshold, in an environment that, unlike academia, features the stresses concomitant with preserving human life and wellbeing.

Long working hours are much more common in some parts of the world than others. Studies showed that the [number](#) of healthcare professionals leaving the NHS because of a poor work-life balance has almost trebled in the last seven years. After almost a year [battling](#) the pandemic, many NHS staff have been left exhausted.

Documentation loads also significantly contribute to exhaustion and burnout. As reported in [the impact of Covid-19 on clinical administration and clinician burnout study](#), 85% of UK clinicians in primary and secondary care agreed that the burden of clinical documentation is a significant contributor to burnout.

This finding comes shortly after the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association published [an article](#) linking clinician burnout to increased documentation, following the adoption of the EHR in the US.

“If you implement bad systems, if you've got slow computers, if you haven't got enough computers, if people can't get onto them, if you don't train people properly, if the system itself is not intuitive, and it is not clinically designed, or led, and it doesn't work properly in terms of what people need in the workflow, then all of that hugely increases stress.”

Dr Tanya Pankhurst, Consultant Nephrologist, Director of Digital Healthcare/CCIO University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB), UK

What prevents clinician burnout? What the clinicians said...

HIMSS also asked the clinicians what could be done to help prevent burnout amongst healthcare professionals.

The full reports examines ten different factors that reduce the risk of burnout. Here are just three, with sample responses from the clinicians:

- A collaborative leadership style — “You need a management team that listens, shares information, gives acknowledgement, and offers training. You need the right equipment and good logistics,” said Nicole Mercier from France.
- Reliability of workplans — “For nursing staff, reliability in the duty roster is what counts above all—not always having to fill in at night because someone has fallen ill. This creates a lot of stress,” answered Prof Christel Bienstein from Germany.
- Efficient administrative processes — “Invest into digital tools and processes to streamline bureaucracy, e. g. reduce the documentation workload,” states Dr Clair Sullivan from Australia.

HIMSS also observes the perception of information and communication technology in healthcare, quoting clinicians on its ability to “reduce stress” and “cope with the tasks ahead.”

It must be the right technology, introduced at the right time, with the right training. Summarising respondents' sentiments, HIMSS notes, “Technology must address a specific issue and create an imminent

value; it ultimately must stand the test of whether it improves working conditions.”

When a new technology passes this test, the benefits are felt by clinicians and patients. As one clinician put it, “Technology helps clinicians reduce stress and be present with their patients, which helps strengthen the therapeutic relationship.”

“Technology has great potential, but you need to get the human element right. Technology needs to add value and make a positive impact to what we do and how we do it, for it to achieve sustained adoption. I think it is about the right technology, at the right time, so we have the right tools for the job.”

Helen Balsdon, Chief Nursing Information Officer, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, UK

Action points for reducing clinician stress

HIMSS concludes its study with a set of clear action points for healthcare organisations. [Download a copy of the white paper to discover its recommendations.](#) Inside, you'll also find:

- The full list of factors that drive and prevent burnout, according to clinicians across the world
- Research into the impact of COVID-19—including data on the use of remote consultations
- Insight into [new technologies](#) that promise to lighten clinician loads

Survey methodology

Nuance Communications commissioned HIMSS to survey clinicians in nine different countries, between November 19, 2020 and February 26, 2021. 443 clinicians participated. 416 clinicians from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and The Netherlands responded to an online survey. 27 clinicians from these countries, Finland, and the UK, were also interviewed as part of a qualitative telephone survey. (Detailed methodology available in [From overload to burnout. What clinicians think.](#))

Tags: [Documentation burden](#), [Burnout](#), [Clinician wellbeing](#)

More Information

Read the research report

Read the new HIMSS study to understand what's driving clinician burnout and how it can be reduced—according to doctors and nurses themselves. Download [From overload to burnout. What clinicians think.](#)

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About Dr. Simon Wallace

Dr. Simon Wallace is the Chief Clinical Information Officer (CCIO) of Nuance's Healthcare division in the UK and Ireland. Simon has worked as a GP, hospital and public health doctor in Brighton and London. His interest in health informatics began in the 90s when he spent a year at the King's Fund investigating the impact of the internet on shared decision making between patients and their healthcare professional. For the past 15 years, he has worked for a range of organisations including Bupa, Dr Foster, Cerner Corporation and GSK across a range of technologies which include electronic patient records, telemedicine, mobile health and lifestyle devices. Simon has a keen interest in the voluntary sector, recently completing a 7 year term as a Trustee for Fitzrovia Youth in Action, a children and young people's charity based in London.



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