

Healthcare AI, Ambient clinical intelligence, Documentation capture

# Reducing clinicians' cognitive load to focus on their well-being

[Dr. Reid Conant](#) | Chief Medical Information Officer, Healthcare

December 18, 2023



To overcome the growing burnout crisis, clinician well-being should be a cornerstone of every health system's strategic thinking. In this article, we'll focus on why reducing clinicians' cognitive load is a critical piece of the well-being puzzle—and discuss one how one health system used the Dragon family of solutions to do just that.

Burnout isn't just a statistic in a medical journal; it has a real impact on the lives of individual clinicians, the patients they care for, and the communities they serve. All of us who work in healthcare have seen the impact of burnout on our colleagues, and most of us have experienced feelings of burnout ourselves at some point in our careers.

To overcome the critical challenges in healthcare—staff shortages, increased demand, and inequitable access to high-quality care—we must put a strategic focus on clinician well-being. But it's important to remember that well-being is much more than an absence of burnout.

Happiness comes from finding meaning and satisfaction in your work, and having the time and energy to do the things you enjoy outside of work. Improving clinician well-being is about helping people recapture the joy of practicing medicine, rediscover the purpose behind their work, and gain a better quality of life. Clinicians who are less stressed and more engaged will provide better care and stay in the profession longer, leading to better outcomes for more patients; research has shown that clinicians suffering from burnout are twice as likely to be involved in patient safety incidents<sup>1</sup>.

## Strategies for improving clinician well-being

There are many ways that modern medical practice can impact clinicians' well-being. In many specialties, prolonged exposure to human suffering can take a large emotional toll. And the feeling that you don't

have the time or resources to do everything you need to for each patient can also be emotionally damaging.

In a recent interview with the American Medical Association<sup>2</sup>, Stefanie Simmons, MD, the Chief Medical Officer at the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, spoke very eloquently about the impact of burnout. She explained that, as well as emotional trauma, many clinicians experience burnout because they "have to work within a system that requests you to spend more than half of your time as a notetaker [...] and, more often than not, not being able to do what you really want to for your patient."

This documentation burden leads many clinicians to stay in the office long after their last patient has left or put in "pajama time" at home to catch up on administrative tasks. Eventually, the inability to switch off and have a life outside of work can become overwhelming.

There's no single answer for solving the well-being puzzle. It's a complex, multifaceted problem that requires a combination of cultural, personal, and systemic changes to provide a long-term solution:

- *Create a supportive work environment:* Find ways to share positive experiences and recognize clinicians' accomplishments, implement wellness programs, and build a culture that prioritizes employee well-being.
- *Foster meaningful connections:* Create peer support networks—safe spaces for clinicians to discuss difficult or traumatic experiences and share coping strategies. And encourage clinicians to build professional connections with colleagues to provide opportunities for learning and support.
- *Address systemic issues:* Implement new processes and technologies to overcome some of the biggest contributors to burnout, including [excessive cognitive load](#) and the growing documentation burden.

## Reducing the cognitive load with the Dragon Family of Solutions

A great example of the third of those approaches can be found at Beacon Health System, a not-for-profit health system serving communities in Indiana and Michigan. Beacon Health recognized that the increased cognitive load from the growing volume and complexity of documentation was having an adverse impact on clinicians' well-being. To support them, the organization deployed the Dragon family of solutions—which includes [Dragon Medical One](#), and [Dragon Ambient eXperience \(DAX\)](#)—that use conversational, ambient, and generative AI to document patient encounters automatically at the point of care.

The Dragon family of solutions produces complete, accurate clinical notes ready for Beacon Health's clinicians to review and sign immediately after each visit, significantly reducing the time it takes to create high-quality clinical documentation. And because the Dragon family captures all medically relevant information during a natural conversation between provider and patient, clinicians don't need to remember every last detail of what was said, reducing their cognitive burden.

"DAX has been very useful in getting my notes completed in a timely fashion," says Dr. David Amrhein, a family medicine specialist at Beacon Health System. "It's also been very helpful in capturing important information during the office visit which I may have missed and not documented otherwise, especially when there are lengthy conversations with patients."

Dr. Scott Eshowsky, Chief Medical Information Officer at Beacon Health System, has seen the impact of the Dragon family and specifically DAX on clinicians who've embedded it in their workflow. "The clinicians that have adopted DAX have not only increased the number of patients that they're able to see every day, but their overall cognitive burden really seems to be less," he says.

## Better quality of life and better patient care

[Beacon Health's story](#) is just one example of how AI-powered solutions like the Dragon family of solutions is helping solve problems that previously seemed insurmountable.

By dramatically reducing the amount of time and mental energy clinicians must spend on routine administrative tasks, the Dragon family of solutions frees them to fully engage with the patient in front of them. It allows them to switch off their computer at the end of the clinic and go home to their family and friends. And it helps them get back to the reason they entered the medical profession in the first place—a dedication to helping people live longer, healthier lives.

---

**Sources:**<sup>1</sup> BMJ 2022;378:e070442<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5-kd4ZbMZo>**Tags:** [Burnout](#), [Dragon Medical One](#), [Dragon Ambient eXperience](#), [Physician wellness](#)**About Dr. Reid Conant**

Dr. Reid Conant is a chief medical information officer for Nuance's Healthcare division. Dr. Conant has provided medical direction and leadership to his hospital through the deployment and optimization of CPOE and physician documentation solutions. Prior to Nuance, Dr. Conant served as the president and founder of Conant and Associates, Inc. which was acquired by Nuance in 2014. For more than eight years, CAI assisted well over 200 organizations, and trained over 10,000 providers on physician documentation solutions. Dr. Conant is an actively practicing board-certified emergency physician and Chief Medical Information Officer of Tri-City Emergency Medical Group in Oceanside, CA. He earned a B.S. in Animal Physiology and Neuroscience at the University of California, San Diego and earned an M.D at Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University.

[View all posts by Dr. Reid Conant](#)