

General Practitioners' Burnout and Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bulgaria

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted healthcare systems worldwide, placing unprecedented demands on healthcare professionals. General Practitioners (GPs) in Bulgaria, like their counterparts globally, have faced substantial challenges during the pandemic, which has affected their mental health and work-life balance. This article examines the extent of burnout among GPs in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 pandemic, their satisfaction with work-life balance, and potential strategies to mitigate these issues. Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress. It is characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The healthcare sector, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been a high-risk environment for burnout due to increased workload, high-stress levels, and the emotional toll of managing a public health crisis. In Bulgaria, GPs have played a crucial role in managing the pandemic, including diagnosing and treating COVID-19 patients, providing vaccination services, and maintaining routine healthcare services. These responsibilities, combined with the risks of exposure to the virus, have exacerbated stress levels and impacted their overall well-being [1,2].

Description

The pandemic has led to a significant increase in the workload of GPs in Bulgaria. The rapid surge in COVID-19 cases necessitated longer working hours, often with insufficient resources and support. GPs were responsible for not only treating patients with COVID-19 but also managing the continuity of care for non-COVID patients, which added to their stress. The extended hours required to manage the increased patient load have left GPs with little time for rest and recovery. Many GPs reported working well beyond their usual hours, including weekends and holidays, to meet the demands of the pandemic. The constant exposure to critically ill patients and the fear of contracting the virus themselves or spreading it to their families have taken an emotional toll on GPs. Witnessing patient suffering and death has contributed to feelings of helplessness and emotional exhaustion. The lack of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), medical supplies, and support staff has further compounded the stress experienced by GPs [3,4]. Many reported feeling unprepared and unsupported in their efforts to combat the virus. The combination of increased workload, emotional stress, and resource limitations has led to a high prevalence of burnout among GPs in Bulgaria during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many GPs reported feeling emotionally drained and overwhelmed by the continuous pressure and demands of their work. Emotional exhaustion was the most

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commonly reported dimension of burnout, reflecting the intense emotional strain of the pandemic [5,6].

Conclusion

Ensuring that GPs have access to sufficient PPE, medical supplies, and support staff is essential to reduce stress and improve their ability to provide care. Adequate resources help alleviate the feeling of being overwhelmed and unsupported. Flexible Work Schedules: Introducing flexible work schedules and ensuring adequate time off can help GPs recover from the physical and emotional strain of their work. This can include rotating shifts, reducing overtime, and providing opportunities for rest and recuperation. Support: Providing mental health support and counseling services can help GPs manage stress and cope with the emotional challenges of the pandemic. Creating a supportive environment where GPs can discuss their experiences and seek help without stigma is crucial. Work-Life Balance Initiatives: Encouraging GPs to engage in activities that promote work-life balance, such as physical exercise, hobbies, and spending time with family, can improve their overall well-being. Healthcare institutions can organize wellness programs and provide resources to support these activities. Providing training and education on stress management, resilience, and coping strategies can empower GPs to handle the challenges of their work more effectively. This can include workshops, seminars, and online resources. Establishing peer support networks where GPs can share their experiences, offer support, and provide practical advice can foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed immense pressure on general practitioners in Bulgaria, leading to high levels of burnout and dissatisfaction with work-life balance. The increased workload, emotional toll, and resource limitations have significantly impacted their well-being. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including providing adequate resources, implementing flexible work schedules, offering mental health support, promoting work-life balance initiatives, and providing training and education. By prioritizing the well-being of GPs and supporting them through these challenging times, the healthcare system can ensure that they are able to continue providing high-quality care to their patients. The lessons learned from the pandemic can also inform future strategies to enhance the resilience and sustainability of the healthcare workforce.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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