

Physician Well-Being at Carilion Clinic: A Local Reflection of a National Crisis

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Background

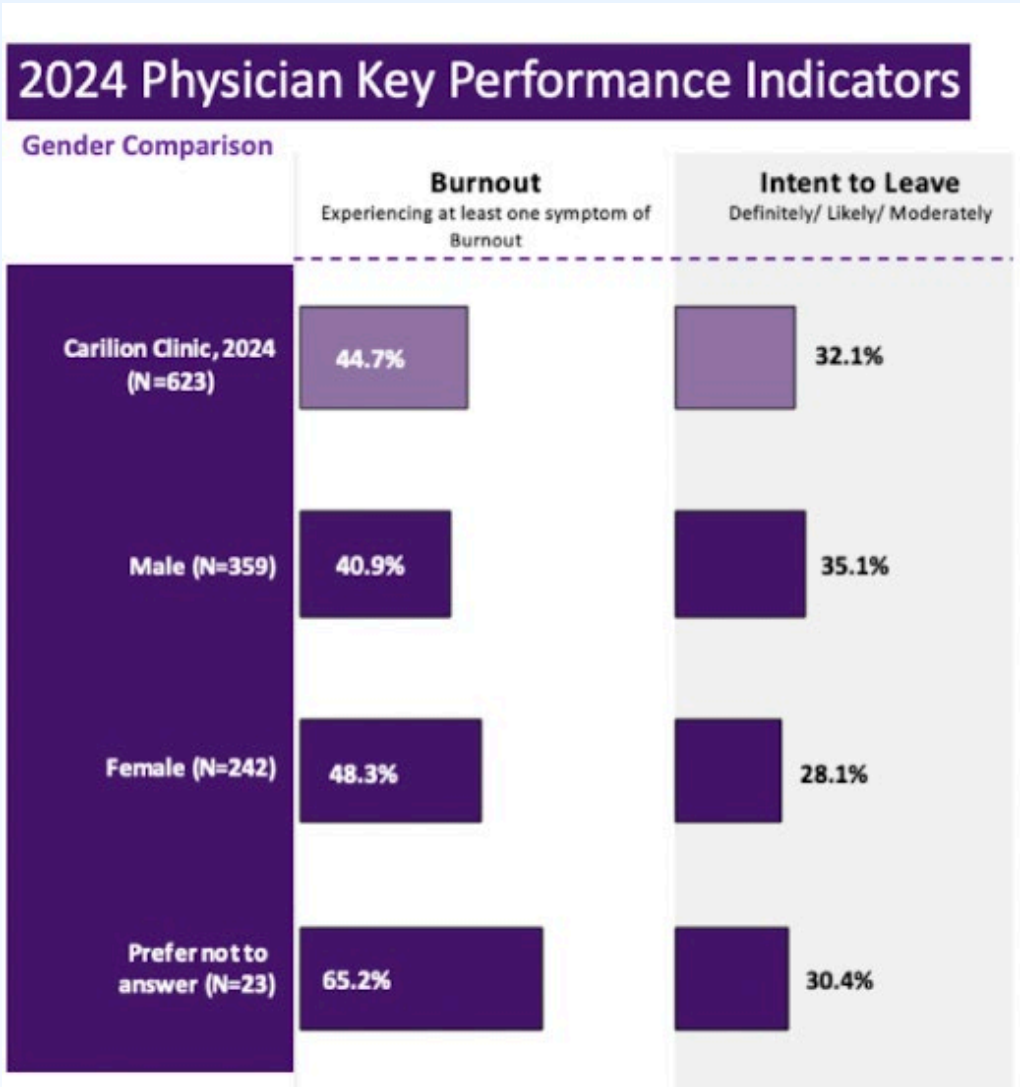
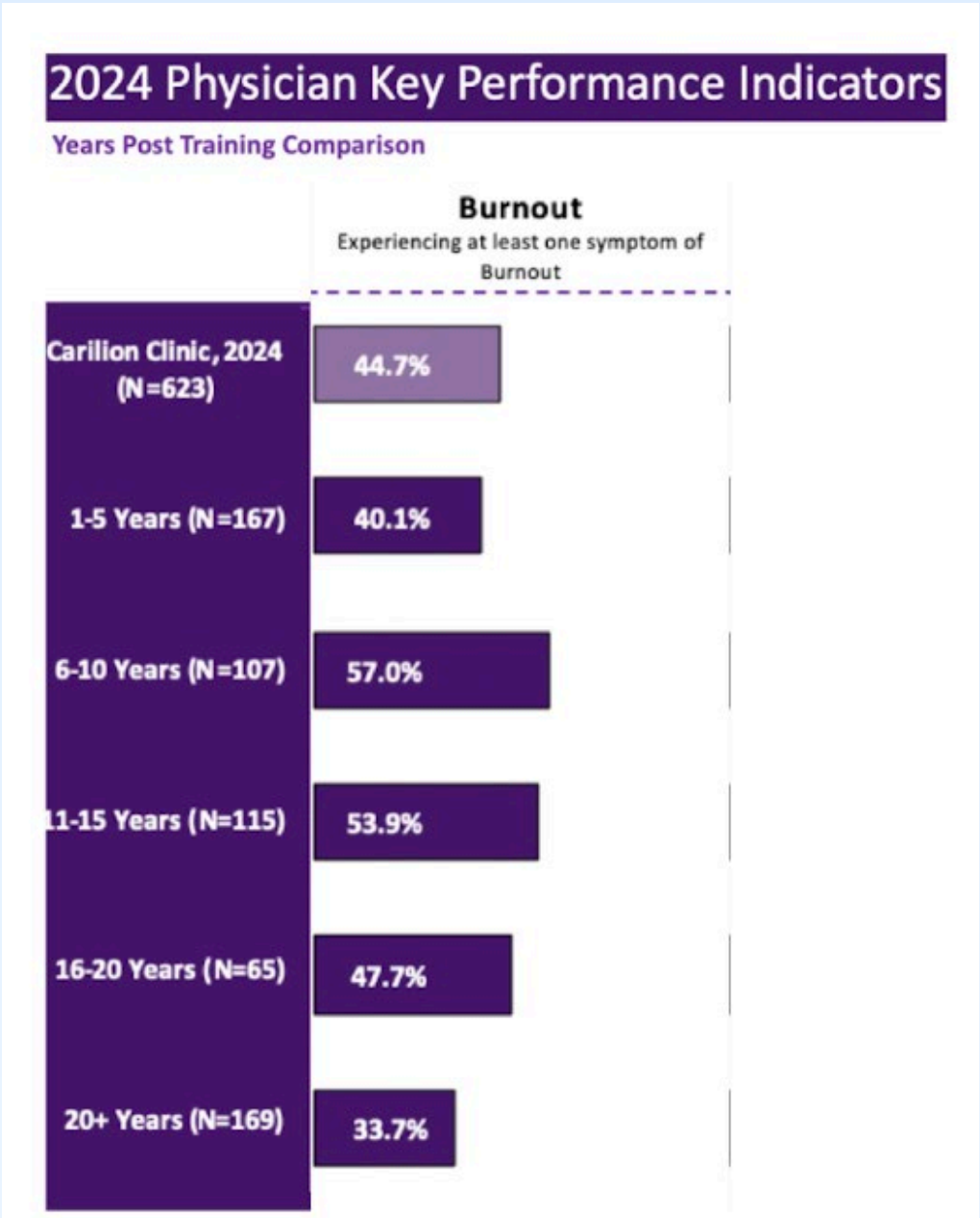
Physician burnout remains a critical concern, with the 2025 Mayo Clinic Proceedings reporting that 47% of physicians nationwide experience burnout. Alarming, physicians are 82% more likely to face burnout than professionals in other fields. The consequences extend beyond individual distress, contributing to decreased quality of care, reduced productivity, and substantial organizational costs. This study aimed to assess physician well-being within Carilion Clinic to identify opportunities for meaningful, targeted improvement. Beyond its clinical and organizational effects, burnout also threatens the quality of medical education. Physicians serve as teachers, mentors, and role models; when burnout diminishes their engagement and enthusiasm, it can create a less supportive and less effective learning environment. Over time, this may contribute to learner disengagement and the normalization of burnout as an acceptable aspect of professional success. Understanding this connection is essential to sustaining both physician well-being and the quality of medical training.

Methods

An anonymous survey link to the AMA Organizational Biopsy was provided to all employed Carilion Clinic attending physicians during November and December 2024. Results were then made available through the AMA Data Lab.

Results

Survey participation: 623 surveys completed, 78% response rate
Overall burnout: 45% of Carilion attendings report burnout



Results

Half of our attendings feel valued by the organization. They rate leadership more favorably than the national average, with 72% reporting that their leader supports their work. Our least burned out department was neurosurgery (10%), while our most burned out department was pediatrics (67%). 26.6% of Carilion physicians spend over 8 hours per week in the electronic health record, compared to a national average of 20.9%.

Conclusion

At Carilion Clinic, physician well-being mirrors national trends. Our data reveal both a broad need for support and several at-risk groups: women, physicians 6–10 years post-training, and those in select specialties. These insights guide initiatives led by Well-Being Directors and Champions across VTCSOM and Carilion Clinic to address root causes of burnout and promote a culture of well-being by fostering supportive work and learning environments. Physician burnout may inadvertently foster learner disengagement or normalize burnout as an accepted cost of success. Anecdotal experience suggests that burned-out physicians are often less engaged and less effective as educators, diminishing the learning experience for trainees. As burnout rates rise nationally, it is crucial to consider its effect on the medical learning environment. Despite its potential impact, this relationship remains largely unstudied and represents a key area for future research.