

Risks Factors for Burnout: Outcomes of a National Survey of Practicing Plastic Surgeons

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Abstract

Purpose: Recent studies by the American College of Surgeons demonstrated that surgeon “burnout” is the primary determinant of career satisfaction and is linked to physician quality of life and patient care.^{1, 2} The purpose of this study was to evaluate risk factors for burnout, career satisfaction, and quality of life among practicing plastic surgeons.

Methods: We distributed an online survey to ASPS members in the US. The survey contained validated measures of burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory), quality of life (SF-8 Health Survey), depression (PRIME-MD) and substance abuse (AUDIT). Additionally, the survey evaluated surgeon demographics, practice characteristics (practice type, subspecialty, academic rank, years in practice, hours worked, salary, reimbursement structure, time devoted to non-clinical academic activities), career satisfaction, and self-perceived medical errors.

Results: To date, 1984 practicing plastic surgeons have completed the survey. While 88.9% of responding surgeons reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their career, 29.8% met validated criteria for “burnout.” Factors associated with burnout included working greater than 80 hours a week and salary less than \$200,000 (or greater than \$500,000). Additional factors included subspecialization, gender, and practice type. Among academic surgeons, junior rank (assistant vs. associate or full professor) and lack of protected time for research and teaching were associated with burnout. Surgeons who were burned out were more likely to report having a major medical errors in the past 6 months (23.2% vs. 13.3%, $p < 0.01$), more likely to screen positive for depression (22.7% vs. 13.8%, $p < 0.05$), and more like to demonstrate unhealthy substance use (17.3% vs. 6.5%, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusions: Although career satisfaction amongst practicing plastic surgeons is high, this survey demonstrates that burnout affects over one-fourth of our colleagues. Risk factors for burnout were identified and clearly associated with practice characteristics and workload.

References:

1. Shanafelt TD et al. Burnout and career satisfaction among American surgeons. *Ann Surg.* 2009 Sep;250(3):463-71.
2. Shanafelt TD et al. Burnout and medical errors among American surgeons. *Ann Surg.* 2010 Jun;251(6):995-1000.

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