

Banishing Burnout: Dr. Gina Passmore
Outline and Study Notes

1. Stress and burnout are all around us in our professional environments; sometimes the stress seems to be overwhelming. Different times and situations produce greater levels of stress, maybe at the holidays or during long summer breaks which both have their own unique sorts of stressors. The phenomenon of burnout in our profession has not been researched and discussed very often as related to US radiation sciences professionals, but recent national presentations, research studies, and conversations have brought the topic into the light, once again. Published in the Spring 2018 edition of Radiation Therapist journal, Dr. Gina Passmore explored the subject of burnout and leadership in radiation therapists. This study enhances my own research work, which was featured in the fall 2018 edition of the ASRT's Radiation Therapist, in which I dug into stress and workplace culture. I asked Gina, on a very fundamental level, what is burnout and how does it show in healthcare professionals?
 - a. Friendenburger\physical response to stress
 - b. Burnout has physical ramifications of being in stress for a long time
 - c. Not feel well, don't sleep, ill feeling, not coping
 - d. Increased sick time, affects organization
2. Some of the most significantly noted stressors that are evident in radiation sciences departments include things like lack of autonomy, overwork and understaffing, and incivility between co-workers. Dr. Passmore discusses the stressors that are found currently in facilities and describes those that represent the highest risk for burnout.
 - a. Maslach and Leiter, who is at risk
 - b. What personality traits, what occupations are more at risk
 - c. Human service worker, takes care of patients
 - d. Nurses, social workers, teachers
 - e. Perfectionists, direct patient care
 - f. Time spent in patient care is directly correlated to burnout
 - g. Caring for the terminally ill, time constraints, women, early in career
3. A stressful or ineffective workplace environment may have far reaching implications...professionals suffering from stress and burnout exhibit particular signs and symptoms; some of which affect their co-workers and their departments. How does the cycle of stress and burnout influence the working environment as a whole? Does this change the dynamics of the entire working team and how?
 - a. Correlation between 3 dimensions of burnout have more sick days
 - b. Affects department for people who work in their place
 - c. Working in more stressful situation, working through lunch, extra work
 - d. 6 workplace influencers--workload, goes up with burnout staff
4. Raised in previous research studies is the prevalence of medical errors as related to stressed employees. What impact does burnout play in the potential for a mis-administration to a patient who is being diagnosed or treated? How does our working environment and our relationships with co-workers affect patient care or patient safety? You will hear Gina refer to work by Dr. Larry Marks of UNC Chapel Hill, notable the book titled Engineering Patient Safety in Radiation Oncology. The link to this book is posted in the show notes.
 - a. 30% increase--level of burnout and the increase in medical errors
 - b. National and international research
 - c. Larry Marks--radiation safety, mentions workload and stress contribute to risk of error

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- d. Rushing, hurriedness
 - e. Increased workload, greater risk of medical errors
 - f. Working alone, not supported, have real risks to patients
5. It has been shown that anger or chaos may result in disengagement, and ultimately apathy towards professional tasks. Not that radiation therapists, or other radiation sciences professionals, become apathetic towards their patients, but they may very well devolve into apathy for their workplace environments and facilities. What are the ways that negativity and co-worker rapport alter the energy and safety of a department? How important are positive working teams? What are the implications and possible consequences of those teams that don't have the inclination to work together harmoniously?
- a. 3 dimensions of burnout-emotional exhaustion
 - b. Staff--chronic fatigue, anxiety, anger
 - c. Depersonalization--away from patients and fellow employees
 - d. Affects how humans work together
 - e. Quick to anger, lack of communication
 - f. Cause increased risk of patient error
 - g. 1-2 employees make day bad--personality doesn't fit in, could be burnout
 - h. Work as team, communicate
6. I found in my own study and in other national and international research that leadership plays a vital role in workplace dynamics and function, both positively and negatively. An Australian study noted that those radiation therapists who were at greater risk for burnout believed that their managers lacked leadership qualities. How does administration inspire positive and successful working relationships or how do they go about transforming those situations which may have become negative and ineffectual?
- a. Leadership role is huge
 - b. Managers who do not understand the actual work, can't understand role of RT
 - c. Stop to go to the bathroom, every minute is timed out for patients
 - d. Not many people work at that level
 - e. Managers need to understand the work that is being done and how to support team
 - f. Increased staffing, ASTRO white paper Safety is No Accident
 - g. Workplace influences--autonomy, recognition, reward
 - h. Want staff to be part of community, how department runs
 - i. Staff to run dept, don't feel stressed from being short staffed and be involved in other initiatives
 - j. Involvement, not just treat patients and go home
 - k. People need to be heard
7. That goes to show how positive and supportive management can inspire their staffs and influence the cohesiveness of their whole departments. It also shows that good leaders allow for growth and potential in their employees, that everyone plays a vital role in the success of a workplace environment. How has Dr. Passmore been able to maintain such happy and healthy places to work? And does she have any open positions in her facility...just kidding but i told her that everyone would want to work with her after you hear how pleasantly run her department is.
- a. Huge turnover problem

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- b. To say that she has been able to maintain all staff
 - c. Value staff, gets good feedback
 - d. Empowers RTTs
8. Gina has referred to the involvement of a community feel for those co-workers in radiation sciences departments. She said that she has found the greatest impact to be when she 'hires for personality and then trains for skill' ...this statement highlights the incredible importance of knowing and trusting your co-workers and your managers. How do managers and other staff support and value their environments and what ways can they celebrate positivity and success?
- a. Community
 - b. Hire for personality and train for skill
 - c. If they can't get along with people, can't do work
 - d. Pay attention to who is being hired, get to know your team
 - e. Mute----the things that RTTs can do: get to know team
 - f. Who you are working beside really matters
 - g. Crosscheck but have a good relationship, easier if you have a good relationship
 - h. Have depts where all employees like each other
 - i. Celebrate, luncheon, recognize individual value
 - j. Value people in your department, even if not from top down
9. The new and wide-spread discussions or even those conversations that take place quietly by radiation therapists, have correlated with the research showing that many radiation sciences professionals do not trust the skills, education, or knowledge of those people working alongside them. Staff find themselves acting to cover for mistakes and potentially serious patient errors made at the hands of those workers who act negligently or recklessly. A large Canadian study showed that resiliency in the healthcare providers at cancer centers was built through the support systems that are found with co-workers and friends and family....How do you best work in an environment that poses these issues and how can you work towards positive support systems and outcomes?
- a. How were those people hired?
 - b. Did the whole team have input?
 - c. Varying skills at being good at different things
 - d. Very seldomly get complaints about each other
 - e. How can we work together for positive feedback
 - f. Different people have different positive traits, work together
 - g. Mutual respect
10. What does the concept of well-being mean to you? How does emotional or physical well-being affect individual professionals and what is the influence of this on the entire team? What does positive well-being look like and how do better cared-for professionals provide better care for their patients? Finally, how do we encourage this pursuit of well-being and who all plays a role in helping rad sciences professionals get there?
- a. Personal accomplishment
 - b. British and Canadian studies--RTTs want to be recognized for experience and knowledge, autonomy to make decisions
 - c. Happier if you feel you are doing something good in your workplace
 - d. Support decisions that are being made

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- e. Relieves pressure for RTTs and admin
 - f. Autonomy vs \$--what is more important--overwhelmingly happier with autonomy
 - g. #1 driver of happiness
 - h. Steve Jobs--"don't hire people and tell them what to do..."
 - i. What's the best way to move forward, what can we do
 - j. You know your job better than I do
 - k. Team knows more about day to day, input is valuable
 - l. Hiring and trusting your people, self-fulfillment
 - m. Prevention-spirituality, connectedness, taking care of yourself, meaningful
11. The Code of Ethics adopted by the ARRT and ASRT, as well as the ARRT Rules of Ethics, address potential causes of medical errors; those being: Communication, Human error as a result of overwork or burnout, and Diagnostic errors. In the case of Human error as a result of overwork or burnout – the radiation sciences professional should exercise care, discretion, and judgment, acting in the best interest of the patient (this relates to the Code of Ethics No. 5). To adequately assess situations and focus, the therapists and technologist should take personal responsibility for the management of stress and work to maintain a healthy emotional or mental state. So how exactly do we, as professionals, accomplish this? How are we supported by management and physicians in these initiatives to benefit our working environments and our patients?
- a. Support
 - b. Mindfulness, focus on patients, busy
 - c. Give opportunities to 'check out' a couple times a day, meditation, breathing
 - d. Some time to do nothing, connect
 - e. Focus on what is going on around us
12. ASTRO and ACR recommend safe staffing levels for radiation therapists, with the minimum being 2 staff members per machine. However, this subject has been hotly debated with many therapists and technologists finding themselves working alone while treating patients, even after the professional guidelines have called for adequate staffing and analysis of medical errors have pointed to overwork and understaffing as the root causes for catastrophic patient mistakes. How do we as professionals, and our administrators keep the focus on our patients in safe respect to productivity?
- a. Staffing guidelines! Patient safety
 - b. Things are getting more advanced, 4 field box, not happening anymore
 - c. Lots of monitors and keyboards, documenting
 - d. Way too much input to have bare minimum of staff
 - e. Cannot treat 8-10 hours a day with only 2 therapists
 - f. Focus on patients
 - g. Radiation safety paper, use for staffing, culture of safety
 - h. Do not treat alone, not safe
 - i. Really when you hire or promote, look at leadership skills
 - j. May not just support buddies if they do not have right skills
 - k. Support department and organization
 - l. Have difficult conversations with doctors or admin, not everyone has that ability
13. Leadership maintains great responsibility in the overall workplace environment; they are in place to lead the team in efficient and positively engaged ways. What is the individual

responsibility of each radiation sciences professional? How are we supposed to care for ourselves and implement successful factors in our own stress, burnout, and desire for positive change?

- a. Different people want to do different things at work, just work vs get involved
 - b. Greater job satisfaction for workers who want to be involved
 - c. What can you do differently, conversations, implement from dept perspective?
 - d. If it is not what you want, then change it
 - e. Brining problems without solutions doesn't resolve anything
 - f. How can you help make this department better
 - g. If you are unhappy with it, imagine what it would look like better, and bring suggestions forward
 - h. Mutual respect, communication
 - i. Know who you are as a person
 - j. Articulate what needs to change and how to implement it
 - k. Professional responsibility...greater responsibility
 - l. Yes, it is responsibility, have to have time and staffing to think through frustrations
 - m. Dont have time to troubleshoot, have time to become part of team
 - n. Effective department
14. We have talked a lot about the significantly high risk for burnout amongst radiation therapists and technologists. What is the take away for those front line employees and for managers? How do you grow positive teamwork, leadership, and effective communication? What advice did Dr. passmore have for supporting all employees and providing essential feedback to the whole team?
- a. Resonating thing--RTTs and RTs we do have a higher risk of burnout, look at all aspects of dept
 - b. Feedback from team, leadership, what people are happy with and not happy with
 - c. Communication
 - d. Get to know team
 - e. Recognize people, do that with teammates too
 - f. How can you recognize co-workers
 - g. Really important to give pats on back, increases teamwork, critical conversations
 - h. Advice for supporting department
15. I told Gina that our mutual passions for positive workplace environments had made this an incredible conversation and, hopefully, a super engaging and interesting podcast episode. I asked her where her exceptionally positive attitude came from? She was very quick to respond with her gratefulness for past mentors and the opportunities she had been provided. Gina demonstrates the impact of paying it forward, of helping to support others because she had received beneficial support along the way in her own career. She provides us all with a call to action which would positively affect our profession and our daily working situations.
- a. Very lucky in jobs, have unique and opportunities
 - b. Trained in Canada, Nova Scotia
 - c. Things seemed to fall in place
 - d. Work with fabulous people
 - e. Mentors

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- f. Support staff, students in all aspects
 - g. Appreciate good past, paying it forward
16. We talked about the detrimental impact of negative thinking, with little regard for growing forward in positive ways. Once again we highlight the code of conduct and ethics, which holds us all to high ethical and professional standards. Be positive in your working environment. Practice professional responsibility and do good things.
- a. Rad therapy code of conduct
 - b. Teach students
 - c. Remember how wonderful it was to work with good people, teach students, and remember bad people
 - d. Stand up for your profession
 - e. People forget to be nice, all or nothing
17. Dr. Passmore ended this incredible discussion with the reminder to ‘just be nice to each other’ ‘Follow the Golden Rule’ I know that won’t fix all issues and doesn’t fit into every situation but it sure would go a long way in making our working relationships and environments more of what we envision them to be. Thank you, Gina, for being a positive light in a somewhat dark place for us all professionally. Be nice, do good things, and take care of yourselves and your patients.

References:

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