

The Prevalence of Burnout and Musculoskeletal Disorders in Physician Associates Students

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ABSTRACT

Physician Associate, formerly known as Physician Assistant, (PA) is a growing occupation that originated in the 1960s. Previous research focused on the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders and burnout in nursing, nursing students, PA, and ubiquitously assumed among many healthcare professionals; however, burnout and musculoskeletal disorders are under-researched in PA students. **PURPOSE:** To investigate the prevalence of burnout and musculoskeletal disorders in Physician Associate students. **METHODS:** This study was conducted at a private university in Florida. Twelve PA students participated in the study, nine females and three males (mean age 26.3 ± 1.8 years; mean height 166.6 ± 7.6 cm; mean weight 67.9 ± 14.0 kg). Eleven PA students were in their fifth clinical rotation and one in their sixth. Maslach Burnout Inventory Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel (MBI) and the Canadian Medical History Checklist: Symptoms Survey for Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs) were used. In the MBI questionnaire, burnout was quantified by three subcomponents: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). The WMSDs questionnaire measured the degree of acute pain in the neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, upper back, lower back, and foot. Participants filled out the two questionnaires in one session and the data were collected and analyzed. **RESULTS:** In the MBI survey, 84% of participants reported high to moderate EE (67% high, 17% moderate, and 17% low); 58.3% of participants reported high to moderate DP (33.3% high, 25% moderate, and 41.7% low); 66.6% of participants reported high to moderate PA (33.3% high, 33.3% moderate, and 33.3% low). In the WMSDs questionnaire, 75% of participants reported having pain or discomfort, in the last year, caused by their job that lasted two days or more in the neck, shoulder, and upper back, whereas 58% reported lower back pain or discomfort. Out of all participants reporting pain or discomfort, several participants reported that pain worsened while working, 67.7% reported for the neck; 44.4% for the shoulder; 67.7% for the upper back; and 57.1% for lower back pain. **CONCLUSION:** The results of the questionnaires indicated a high prevalence of burnout and musculoskeletal disorders in PA students. Physician Associate programs should include educational content emphasizing techniques to minimize burnout and reduce the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders. Further research is needed to identify the influence of physical activity and relaxation techniques on burnout levels and the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders in PA students.