

**Burnout Among Ambulatory Nurse Managers: Insights from Qualitative Focus Groups**

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### **Main Points**

- **High Turnover:** Ongoing turnover among nurse managers, particularly in ambulatory settings, significantly impacts organizational stability.
- **Burnout Prevalence:** A significant percentage of ambulatory nurse managers experience burnout, with 40.9% reporting feelings of burnout in a recent survey.
- **Contributing Factors:** Workload, administrative burden, staffing concerns, and lack of organizational support contribute to burnout.
- **Impact on Care:** Burnout negatively affects patient care, team functioning, and the overall work environment.
- **Health Consequences:** Burnout manifests physically and emotionally, affecting ambulatory nurse managers' personal and professional lives.
- **Recommendations:** Future studies should consider larger sample sizes and emphasize leadership support, training, and sustainable practices.

### **Background**

The shift from inpatient to ambulatory care represents a profound change in healthcare delivery, highlighting the critical role of nurse managers in managing and enhancing patient care in outpatient settings (Schlaak, 2019). These nurse managers are essential in implementing the organization's mission, vision, and values into practical strategies that ensure superior patient care (Schlaak, 2019). Despite their importance, the role is challenging, especially in ambulatory care, where high demands and limited resources are common. One major issue nurse managers face is burnout, which significantly impacts their performance and well-being (Kelly et al., 2019). Addressing and mitigating burnout is vital for maintaining high-quality care and achieving organizational goals in ambulatory settings. An academic medical center in the Southeastern United States has recognized burnout among ambulatory nurse managers as a significant issue.

### **Purpose**

This executive summary addresses burnout among ambulatory nurse managers and outlines a project to explore this problem. High turnover rates among nurse managers pose a significant threat to

organizational stability, making it crucial to understand and mitigate burnout. This project utilizes focus groups to conduct a qualitative analysis of burnout experiences among ambulatory nurse managers. By exploring their personal experiences, the study aims to identify the root causes of burnout and develop specific strategies to address these issues. The ultimate goal is to create a supportive and sustainable work environment for ambulatory nurse managers, enabling them to thrive and deliver high-quality patient care.

### **Methodology**

Data was collected through semi-structured focus group interviews guided by open-ended questions derived from the literature review and study objectives. The first focus group included six current ambulatory nurse managers with varying experience levels. The second group consisted of two former ambulatory nurse managers who had left the role within the past six months. The first focus group was reconvened later to review and confirm the initial findings and to follow up on any additional insights. All discussions were recorded with the participant's consent, and the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Participation was consistent and engaged throughout the study.

The data from the focus group interviews were interpreted using thematic analysis, with NVivo software aiding in the coding and organization of the data. Themes were identified, reviewed, and documented to ensure thorough analysis. To maintain credibility and reliability, the project lead carefully selected participants used neutral questioning techniques and applied rigorous data analysis methods to minimize bias. The project timeline began with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission and approval on November 20, 2023. Focus group sessions started on January 23, 2024, and continued until March 1, 2024, with data collection for the post-intervention phase concluding by April 1, 2024.

### **Results**

Ambulatory nurse managers highlighted numerous workloads, responsibilities, and staffing challenges that significantly impact the difficulty of their roles, with many reporting taking on extra duties beyond their job descriptions, further adding to their already heavy workload. Moreover, turnover among managers and a shortage of replacements frequently forced these nurse managers to oversee multiple clinics, compounding their stress and workload. Administrative tasks such as generating detailed reports and undergoing audits further burden them, leaving minimal time for direct patient care. High turnover rates among medical assistants and challenges in finding qualified candidates exacerbate these issues.

Communication challenges at the medical center delay decision-making and change implementation. Insufficient support from departments like Human Resources and Supply Chain complicates operational issue resolution. Financial constraints further impact staffing and resources, adding to stress. Managers emphasized the need for more support and visibility from upper management, suggesting improvements in organizational processes and regular, effective communication (Miller et al., 2021).

Burnout manifests in physical and emotional symptoms such as migraines, gastrointestinal issues, and apathy, hindering effectiveness. Lack of sleep due to anxiety about the workweek exacerbates these symptoms. Burnout impacts personal well-being, leading to high stress, lack of exercise, and poor work-life balance, often resulting in seeking other positions (Prochnow et al., 2021).

Burnout also affects patient care and team functioning. These managers struggle with care improvements due to time constraints and symptoms, limiting their ability to involve staff in problem-solving. This highlights the necessity for interventions to support ambulatory nurse managers in managing their workload and enhancing leadership effectiveness.

### **Strengths & Limitations**

This qualitative study on burnout among ambulatory nurse managers leveraged focus groups effectively to delve into the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by participants, enriching the understanding of burnout's root causes and impacts. By including current and former nurse managers, the study captured diverse perspectives, enhancing the depth and validity of its findings. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed, ensuring participant confidentiality and adherence to research standards. However, the study's sample size of eight participants and its single-site focus limit the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context studied. The qualitative nature also precludes statistical analysis, necessitating future research to validate and extend these qualitative insights.

### **Implications & Conclusion**

The findings underscore the urgent need for healthcare organizations to implement targeted interventions addressing workload management, staffing support, and organizational communication to mitigate burnout among ambulatory nurse managers. These strategies enhance job satisfaction and well-being, improve patient care outcomes, and reduce turnover rates. Integrating evidence-based practices informed by these insights is crucial for fostering a supportive work environment that empowers nurse managers to thrive and deliver optimal patient care. Continued research and collaborative efforts are essential to sustainably address burnout and promote resilience among healthcare leaders, aligning with broader goals of enhancing workforce satisfaction and healthcare quality.

### References

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