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## Seeking balance: how burnout syndrome can affect Romanian healthcare workers and why it can spur migration

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For the healthcare system, the healthcare professionals are just like the supporting pillars of a bridge. Let's take a moment to reflect on what happens to the bridge, when these pillars are put under such overwhelming pressure that they become fragile!

Professional fatigue and burnout syndrome are growing challenges for Romanian healthcare professionals. A study conducted by the [Romanian College of Physicians](#) has revealed worrying results, particularly in terms of the correlation between the risk of burnout and the declared intention to migrate abroad.

According to the study, more than a third of the physicians participating in the study recorded high scores, indicating an increased likelihood of clinically manifesting some form of burnout symptoms. The main component contributing to this risk is exhaustion, accounting for 58% of the total score.

The results of this recent study are similar to those emerging from the in-depth interviews conducted under a 2021-2022 research study, examining the factors influencing the decision to migrate among healthcare workers as part of the Pillars of Health project (the research report can be [accessed here](#)).

At the time, a head doctor in a Romanian hospital mentioned that the shortage of medical professionals was taking a heavy toll on the emotional health of all staff: *"We are very few, tired, frustrated. We don't have time for ourselves or for our lives. Automatically, if there were more of us, the work would have been divided, it would have been easier, there would have been more opinions, things would have been much better. The shortage of doctors is known to everyone, everyone is howling about it."* (doctor, head of ward Romania).

But, even more than the shortage of medical personnel, the doctor we spoke to noted that the real problem is the lack of organisation at institutional level, the lack of effective communication between medical staff in medical institutions and the lack of a multidisciplinary team within which everyone's contributions are acknowledged and valued: *"Another aspect that is very deficient in our country: there is no teamwork. One works individually. We see this in the work of nurses as well. They are not trained to work as part of a team. It's hectic and tiring. Everyone is frustrated at the end of the day. Then, it's only natural to want to try something else, somewhere else."* (doctor, head of ward Romania).

On the other hand, the simple decision to leave due to signs of extreme fatigue does not solve the problem, neither for the health system nor for the person who decides to migrate.

The Pillars of Health research in Romania has demonstrated that the problems of extreme fatigue are also felt by Romanian doctors who have decided to leave the country and continue to work abroad. According to one respondent to the survey, working conditions in France have deteriorated in recent years due to a severe shortage of staff, which puts a lot of pressure on the remaining personnel. As a result, stress and overwork are also present in the French healthcare system: *"We are in great difficulty, with very long waiting times, with ever-increasing emergencies, with days, weeks at a time when we don't eat lunch and don't leave the hospital before 7.30pm. If you leave at 6:30 p.m., everyone looks at you like it's noon."* (Romanian doctor, currently practising in France).

Similar to the Romanian healthcare system, the Romanian doctor we spoke to, who is now working in France, admits that the relationship between doctors and nurses of French nationality is not ideal, although she feels that there is an exception and has offered some explanations for this: *"There is this conflict between doctors and nurses all over the world, which could now be officially recognised. But there are some nurses who have taught us even more than our teachers. When they saw how we take care of patients and when they acknowledged the respect we have for their job, which they were not quite used to, they taught us things of common sense, about work on the ground, which we did not benefit from and could not understand immediately. There are more conflicts between French doctors and nurses than we have with nurses."* (Romanian doctor, currently practising in France)

In a nutshell, these are universal problems for which some European countries have sought solutions. They have implemented a variety of methods to manage burnout in the healthcare system, from direct interventions to strategic ones. One example is the United Kingdom. Here, the National Health Service (NHS) has introduced the "[NHS Health and Wellbeing Framework](#)", which includes policies such as providing access to counselling services, implementing stress management and resilience training programmes, promoting work-life balance and establishing counselling programmes for employees. The NHS also [conducts surveys](#), to assess employee experience and well-being, which helps in identifying areas for improvement. In addition, through the "[Integrated Care and Support Pioneers Programme](#)", the NHS is devoting attention to [teamwork and collaboration](#), which contributes to an even distribution of workload and helps prevent undue stress on healthcare professionals at an individual level.

This model can be an example of how decision makers in the healthcare sector and relevant institutions can contribute to reducing the incidence of burnout and improving the well-being of healthcare professionals.

From targeted interventions, such as strengthening an intra- and inter-disciplinary working team at the level of a healthcare institution or introducing staff satisfaction surveys, to systematic, nationally implemented measures aimed at providing physical and mental health support to healthcare staff as well as facilitating safe environments for the exchange of experiences and advice, these can support and encourage healthcare professionals to continue working in a healthy, balanced and fulfilling manner.

For more information on the themes discussed and the research findings on the factors influencing the migration of Romanian health workers, the analysis of their personal work experiences, as well as the solutions identified by the respondents for the retention and return to Romania of the departed healthcare professionals, we encourage you to explore [the research report](#).