

CASE STUDIES

Understanding and addressing workplace burnout: Strategies for supporting patient/client wellbeing

Paul

Patient background

Paul is a 58-year-old Human Resources Manager in a large organisation. He has a demanding job, with an excessive workload that results in him often working long hours. He is under-resourced and increasingly feels like he does not have the time to do his job well. He feels unsupported by colleagues and his manager, which means he is not taking regular breaks, and his work is creeping into his personal time. Paul is married with two teenage children.

Presenting symptoms

Paul presented to his treating GP after having been off work on sick leave for three days. He is dreading the return to work, has been feeling constantly tired, has been struggling to fall asleep at night with thoughts of work, and recently noticed he was grinding his teeth at night and waking with a sore jaw. At home he was becoming increasingly short tempered with his family. He is concerned about the impact of his mood on his family. He disclosed that his alcohol consumption had increased over the last few months. Paul knew he was stressed and was unsure how to manage the situation.

Work participation

Paul is apprehensive about raising concerns about work with his manager. He feels ill equipped to approach his manager about expectations and boundaries and worries about the impact these concerns and challenges might have on his employment and his relationships at work.

Leah

Patient background

Leah is a 41-year-old high school teacher. She is divorced and shares custody of her two primary school aged children with her ex-partner. Her workload as a teacher has always been high, but administrative changes over the last few years have introduced prolonged challenges with staffing and work distribution. The changes have contributed to Leah feeling stressed and tired, which has resulted more recently in her taking sick days.

Presenting symptoms

Leah first presented to her GP with a complaint of fatigue, stress and headaches. These symptoms have contributed to a decrease in appetite and weight loss. She expressed her job satisfaction has diminished and that she is feeling unsupported and isolated at work. She has no chronic medical conditions and takes no medication. Recent lab results all came back normal. She also reports an amicable relationship with her ex-partner and children. Leah raised concerns that her symptoms may represent burnout.

Work participation

Leah informally raised concerns with her manager, who suggested she take the time off work to recharge and seek support. Her manager was genuinely concerned about her wellbeing. She reassured Leah that upon her return they would work through actionable changes to her workload, including what supports she needed to perform her job effectively, what role clarity or capability uplift she or other colleagues might need and what options were available to help facilitate more work-life balance moving forward.