

For Some Ills, There Is No Pill

Category: Fatigue

written by Olapeju Simoyan | September 29, 2020

Fatigue comes in many forms. Physical fatigue. Compassion fatigue. Emotional fatigue.

I should know about physical fatigue, the kind I experience when I realize that I can't jog for more than three minutes without taking a break. Then I remember that I am overdue for my iron infusions. Way overdue. I blame my poor self-care on my recent move—in the midst of a pandemic—and how the circumstances were not exactly conducive to getting under the care of new physicians, despite being a physician myself.

Then there's the emotional fatigue I experience from listening to the news and following social media. So much racism and hatred. So much misinformation about the pandemic. So much political conflict.

Self-care is important to us as healthcare professionals since we are at high risk for burnout. Unfortunately, we work in a system that discourages us from seeking help or taking needed breaks.

Some patients get upset with their physicians for taking vacations. Physicians often fear the repercussions of seeking professional help for mental health issues.

Licensing agencies and malpractice companies ask questions about past mental health treatment, suggesting that this is a liability issue and discouraging doctors from seeking care when they need it.

I have even seen a malpractice form that included a question asking if a physician had a history of mental health treatment, drug addiction, or being a sexual offender. All in the same question! Why would anyone lump a previous history of depression or anxiety in the same category with substance abuse and sexual offenses? Are we not entitled to the same right to privacy that our patients have?

We need to give ourselves permission to seek professional help for ourselves, without fear of retribution, whether it's physical or mental health.

I finally have been able to get under the care of a local physician. I got the needed iron infusions and hopefully that will take care of my fatigue and enable me to exercise again.

And while I am hopeful about curing my physical fatigue, my emotional fatigue intensified while writing this essay. I was sitting in a park, typing on my laptop and a total stranger yelled, "You stupid n—" as he drove by. He repeated himself, calling me the "n" word. Unfortunately, there is no infusion or pill for that.

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