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# OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT, PSYCHOLOGICAL STATUS AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS WORKING IN OUTPATIENT SETTINGS

Aim To study features of the psychological status, job burnout syndrome (JBS) m and quality of life (QoL)

in outpatient physicians.

Material and methods This cross-sectional study was performed at 16 randomly selected municipal outpatient hospitals of

Moscow and included physicians (district physicians, primary care physicians, and cardiologists). The participants signed an informed consent form and then filled out a registration card that included major social and demographic (sex, age, education, position) and professional characteristics (specialization, work experience, qualification category), and questionnaires. The degree of job burnout was evaluated with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS), and the presence of anxio-depressive symptoms was evaluated with the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). The level of stress was assessed with a visual analogue scale (VAS) in a score range from 0 to 10. The QoL of physicians was assessed with the short version of the World Health Organization Quality of Life (HOQOL-BREF)

questionnaire.

Results This study included 108 physicians from 16 municipal outpatient clinics aged 24 to 70 years (mean

age, 44.0 $\pm$ 13.1 years), mostly women (87.0%). Among JBS components, a high level of emotional exhaustion was observed in 50.0% of physicians, a high level of depersonalization in 34.1%, and a severe reduction of personal accomplishment in 37.5%. A high level of stress (VAS score  $\geq$ 7) was observed in 66.3% of physicians; symptoms of anxiety and depression of any degree (HADS-A and HADS-D subscale score  $\geq$  8) were found in 23.8 and 22.7% of participants, respectively. 42.0% of physicians evaluated their QoL lower than «good» and 41.6% of physicians evaluated their health condition lower than «good». Most of the studied factors did not significantly depend on the gender and the duration of work, except for emotional exhaustion (55.3% of women and 16.7% of men;

p=0.0086) and a high level of stress (72.2% of women and 28.6% of men; p=0.002).

Conclusion The study showed a high prevalence of personal factors that potentially adversely affect the work of

outpatient physicians. These factors included high degrees of stress, anxio-depressive symptoms, job burnout, unsatisfactory QoL, and low satisfaction with own health. Management decisions and actions are required to create the optimum psychological climate at the workplace of physicians, to develop new strategies for prophylaxis and correction of their psychological condition, and to implement comprehensive programs for improving the professional environment to maintain and enhance the

mental health and to increase the professional prestige of the medical speciality.

Keywords Primary health care; job burnout; anxiety; depression; stress

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The concept of burnout in health care professionals appeared in the late 1960s to assess the psychological stress experienced by medical staff working with patients in free-of-charge clinics [1]. Later, the scope of the burnout concept expanded significantly and was used in relation to stress associated with the occupation in general and working in any medical

facility [2, 3]. The concept of burnout syndrome was introduced by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in 1974 [4]. The American psychologists, Christina Maslach and Susan Jackson, actively studied this condition and described it in 1976 as emotional exhaustion. Factors included the development of negative self-assessment, a negative

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job attitude, and loss of understanding and caring towards patients [5]. Based on fundamental works by C. Maslach and other authors carried out in the 1980s, the general assessment of burnout syndrome is based in modern scientific literature on certain combinations of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment when exposed to chronic stress caused by professional activities [1].

According to some sources, burnout syndrome occurs in 30-90% of health care professionals and depends on the length of service, specialty, age, gender, and region of residence [6, 7]. A large study conducted in the United States in 2012, in which 7,288 doctors of various specialties took part, can be taken as an example. It was found that 45.8% of American doctors were exposed to burnout syndrome, 10% higher than the population average [8]. Emergency doctors, family doctors, and neurologists felt the most exhausted [8-10]. It should be noted that doctors have higher levels of psychological stability than the general working population, inversely related to the burnout syndrome. However, burnout syndrome is common even among doctors with the highest possible stability, i.e., even the most mentally resilient doctors are at significant risk of burnout syndrome [11].

Several foreign and Russian trials have shown that the high prevalence of burnout syndrome in health care professionals is associated with frequent medical errors, lower quality of medical care, lower patient satisfaction, longer patient recovery after discharge, and increased attrition in the sector [12–14]. Burnout syndrome has serious consequences not only for the quality of medical care, but also for the health of health care professionals, such as the development of cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), depression, alcohol misuse, and reduced life expectancy [15–18].

Depressive symptoms, quite common in doctors, are closely related to burnout syndrome [19, 20]. Mata et al. showed in their systematic review that the prevalence of depressive symptoms in resident physicians was 28.8%. It varied from 20.9% to 43.2% depending on the assessment tool used [20]. Interestingly, there is a bidirectional correlation between depressive symptoms and medical errors. A large systematic review and meta-analysis of 11 trials including 21,517 physicians, demonstrated a correlation between the symptoms of depression in physicians and an increased risk of medical errors (odds ratio (OR) 1.95; 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.63-2.33) [21]. At the same time, according to four trials (n=4,462), medical errors are associated with the subsequent development of depressive symptoms in doctors (OR 1.67; 95% CI 1.48-1.87). Several papers

showed that the timely detection and treatment of depression in doctors reduced the number of medical errors that they make, improves the well-being of doctors and the quality of their work with patients [22].

In recent years high demands have been placed on health care professionals. This is due to the increased pace and intensity of medical care, including with regard to the quality of care. All this raises the emotional burden on the employees of medical facilities. There is an active tendency to consider the health of medical staff as an important factor in assessing the quality of the facility's work [23, 24].

# **Objective**

Study the features of the psychological status, burnout syndrome, and quality of life of outpatient physicians.

## Material and methods

A cross-sectional study was carried out in 16 public polyclinics in Moscow. They were selected at random from the complete list of public adult polyclinics provided on the website of the Moscow Department of Health (www.mosgorzdrav.ru). The management personnel of polyclinics (chief physicians and/or chief medical officers) authorized the study, after which district primary care physicians, general practitioners, and cardiologists of polyclinics were invited to take part in the study through an anonymous survey.

Inclusion criteria were as follows:

- position held: outpatient primary care physicians (district physicians, general practitioners, cardiologists) engaged in clinical activities at the time of the study, and providing professional medical care to patients at high/very high risk of developing CVDs and having CVDs;
- 2) place of work: public polyclinics in Moscow;
- 3) signed consent to take part in the study. *Exclusion criteria*:
- 1) refusal of the polyclinic's management to authorize the study;
- 2) refusal of an outpatient physician to participate in the study;
- 3) incorrect completion of the case report form and questionnaires, preventing their statistical processing.

After signing the informed consent, all participants completed the case report form containing the main social and demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, position) and professional characteristics (specialty, years of employment, qualification category), and questionnaires.



Burnout level was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) [25]. The questionnaire includes 3 subscores: emotional exhaustion (9 statements); depersonalization (5 statements); and personal accomplishment (8 statements). The answers are evaluated by subscores from 0 to 6, wherein 0 corresponds to «never,» and 6 corresponds to «every day». Thus the maximum scores are 54, 30, and 48 points for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments, respectively. The greater the score for each individual subscore, the more severe are the different aspects of burnout syndrome. The threshold values were: ≤16 and  $\leq 25$  for the emotional exhaustion subscore;  $\leq 6$  and ≤11 for the depersonalization subscore; and ≤30 and ≤37 for the personal accomplishments subscore (low, medium, and high levels, respectively).

Anxiety and depressive symptoms were assessed using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) [26]. A score of 8–10 in the HADS-A (anxiety) and HADS-D (depression) subscales corresponded to the presence of symptoms of subclinical anxiety and depressive symptoms. A score of  $\geq$ 11 corresponded to clinically pronounced anxiety and depressive symptoms. The visual analog scale (VAS) from 0 to 10 was used to assess the stress level. VAS $\geq$ 5 corresponded to the increased level of stress; VAS $\geq$ 7 – a high level of stress; and VAS of 9–10 corresponded to the highest possible stress Level.

The World Health Organization Quality of Life Brief Version (WHOQOL-BREF) questionnaire, comprising 26 facets [27], was used to assess the physicians' quality of life. Following this methodology, the first two facets regarding the quality of life and health satisfaction were evaluated separately. The remaining 24 facets were grouped into four domains: Domain 1 - Physical Health, including the following subdomains: pain and discomfort, activities of daily living, energy and fatigue, mobility, sleep, and rest; Domain 2 - Psychological and its subdomains: positive and negative feelings; thinking, learning, memory and concentration; self-esteem, bodily image and appearance, religion; Domain 3 - Social relationships and its subdomains: personal relationships, social support, sexual activity; Domain 4 - Environment and its subdomains: financial resources, physical safety and security, health and social care (accessibility and quality), home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information and skills, physical environment, transport. The results were evaluated according to the scale attached to the instructions for the questionnaire. The scale ranges from 0 to 100. The higher the score, the higher the quality of life.

Statistical analysis of the data was carried out using the SAS software suite (Statistical Analysis System, SAS Institute Inc., USA). The mean and standard deviation (M±SD) were calculated for quantitative variables (e.g., blood pressure) measured using an interval scale. The rate of detection in percentage or the rate of registration of different rank estimates were determined for categorical indicators measured using the nominal scale and ordinal variables measured using the rank scale, respectively. The causality between variables was estimated using contingency tables and calculating the chi-squared test and Cramer's contingency coefficient. The Student's T-test was calculated for independent samples in the analysis of intergroup differences measures using the interval scale. The differences were statistically significant at p<0.05.

#### Results

The study included 108 physicians from 16 public polyclinics from 24 to 70 years of age (mean age 44.0±13.1 years), mainly women (87.0%). 52% of the physicians were between 40-65 years of age. The percentage of physicians under 29 years old was 15%; 30-39 years - 27%; and 66 years and older - 6%. The study included 90 (83.3%) district primary care physicians and general practitioners, and 18 (16.7%) cardiologists. 30.6% of doctors had been working in their specialty for less than 5 years; 15.7% from 5 to 9 years; 17.6% from 10 to 19 years; and and 36.1% for more than 20 years. 9.3% of specialists possessed the first qualification category; 2.8% the second qualification category; 30.6% the highest qualification category; and 54.6% of physicians did not possess a qualification category.

50.0% of the physicians included in the study were suffering from high emotional exhaustion, while 33.0% had moderate emotional exhaustion (Figure 1). There was a relatively high prevalence of increased depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishments (34.1 and 37.5%, respectively) in physicians participating in the study.

Gender-related factors of burnout were established in outpatient physicians. According to the data in Table 1, the mean level of emotional exhaustion among female physicians is significantly higher than among male physicians (25.8±9.1 vs. 18.3±9.3; p<0.001). Moreover, high levels of emotional exhaustion were to a statistically significant degree more common among female physicians than in male physicians (55.3% vs. 16.7%; p<0.01).

Increased levels of stress were observed in 92.3% of physicians; high levels of stress in ½ of the physicians;



Figure 1. The degree of burnout of outpatient physicians

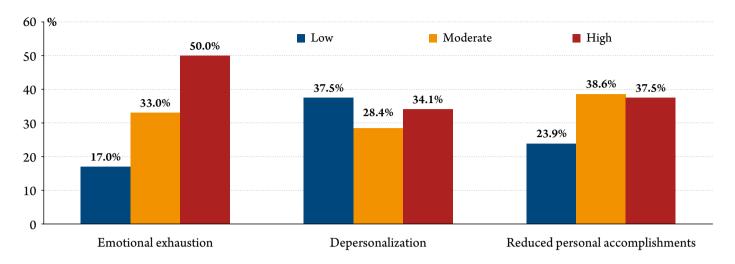


Table 1. Gender-specific features of the psychological status, burnout syndrome, and quality of life of outpatient physicians

Parameter		Female	Male	p
Age, years	44.0±13.1	45.3±13.2	37.6±12.1	0.047
Age < 40 years, %	46.3	43.6	64.3	n/s
Employment for up to 10 years, %	52.3	47.3	85.7	0.0037
Burnout syndrome				
Emotional exhaustion, score	24.7±9.4	25.8±9.1	18.3±9.3	0.0009
High emotional exhaustion, %	50.0	55.3	16.7	0.0086
Depersonalization, score	7.9±5.1	8.1±5.1	7.3±4.7	n/s
High depersonalization, %	34.1	34.2	33.3	n/s
Reduced personal accomplishments, score	32.0±6.5	32.3±6.2	30.5±8.3	n/s
High reduction of personal accomplishments, %	37.5	35.5	50	n/s
Level of stress (VAS)				
Level of stress, VAS score	7.1±2.1	7.3±2.1	5.5±1.8	0.003
Increased stress (≥5 points), %	92.3	93.3	85.7	n/s
High stress (≥7 points), %	66.3	72.2	28.6	0.002
Highest possible stress (9–10 points), %	24.8	28.6	0	0.0002
Anxiety symptoms				
HADS-A, score	4.8±3.5	5.0±3.4	3.2±3.7	0.08
Any anxiety symptoms (HADS-A≥8), %	23.8	26.3	8.3	n/s
Clinically pronounced anxiety symptoms (HADS-A $\geq$ 11), %	6.8	6.6	8.3	n/s
Depressive symptoms				
HADS-D, score	4.9±3.3	4.9±3.2	5.3±4.0	n/s
Any depressive symptoms (HADS-D≥8), %	22.7	22.3	25.0	n/s
Clinically pronounced depressive symptoms (HADS-D≥11), %	5.7	2.6	25.0	0.023
Quality of life				
Quality of life, score	3.6±0.73	3.6±0.8	3.6±0.7	n/s
The proportion of physicians who assessed their quality of life as worse than good, %	41.6	42.8	33.3	n/s
The proportion of physicians who assessed their quality of life as good and very good, %	58.4	57.1	66.6	n/s
Very satisfied with physical health				
Very satisfied with physical health, score	3.4±0.9	3.4±0.9	3.6±0.7	n/s
The proportion of physicians who assessed their satisfaction with physical health as worse than good, %	42.0	44.2	33.3	n/s
The proportion of physicians who assessed their satisfaction with physical health as good and very good, %	58.0	55.8	66.6	n/s

If not otherwise specified, the data is expressed as the mean and standard deviation  $(M \pm SD)$ . VAS, visual analog scale; n/s, not significant.



while the highest possible levels were observed in every fourth specialist (see Table 1). The mean stress level (VAS) was significantly higher in female physicians than in male physicians ( $7.3\pm2.1$  vs.  $5.5\pm1.8$ ; p<0.003). Thus, the proportion of female physicians with high levels of stress was much more significant (72.2% vs. 28.6%; p=0.0021). The maximum level of stress (VAS 9–10) was observed in 28.6% of female physicians and was absent in male physicians.

60.9% of outpatient physicians included in the study did not present anxiety or depressive symptoms. 39.1% of physicians showed anxiety and/or depressive symptoms at any level. 10.2% had clinically pronounced anxiety and/or depression, and 2.3% had a combination of both.

Anxiety symptoms were observed in 23.8% of the specialists included in the study. Gender-related analysis showed a trend towards a slightly higher severity of anxiety in female physicians when compared to male physicians  $(5.0\pm3.4 \text{ vs. } 3.2\pm3.7)$ . Depressive symptoms of any level were observed in 22.7% of outpatient physicians. At the same time, the proportion of male physicians with clinically pronounced depressive symptoms was significantly higher than the proportion of female physicians (25.0% vs. 2.6%; p=0.023).

According to the WHOQOL-BREF, 58.4% of physicians included in the study had a good and very good quality of life, other specialists were divided in a roughly equal extent (21% each): poor or neither poor nor good quality of life (Figure 2, A).

Physicians assessed their health as follows: 58.4% of the doctors included in the study were satisfied and very satisfied with their health; 34.8% of specialists were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 6.8% of physicians were dissatisfied with their health (Figure 2, B).

Table 2 demonstrates that outpatient physicians had the highest mean score in the social sphere. This included home environment, social support, and sexual

activity, while the lowest score for the physical health evaluating physical pain and discomfort, activities of daily living, energy, and fatigue, mobility, sleep and rest.

There were no significant gender-related differences in the quality of life and health satisfaction among the physicians included in the study (see Table 1).

Analysis of the characteristics of psychological status, burnout syndrome, and quality of life depending on age and years of employment showed that the mean levels of burnout, stress, anxiety, depression, and satisfaction with health among polyclinic physicians were approximately the same and did not differ statistically significantly (Table 3).

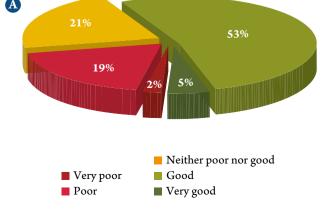
The only exception was a significantly higher level of quality of life in younger physicians (less than 40 years)  $(3.8\pm0.5 \text{ vs. } 3.4\pm0.8)$  and physicians with less than 10 years of professional experience  $(3.8\pm0.7 \text{ vs. } 3.4\pm0.7)$ .

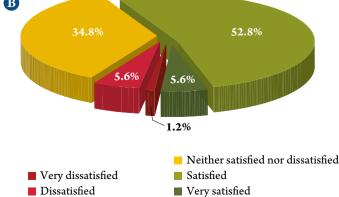
## Discussion

The study revealed a high prevalence of burnout syndrome in primary care physicians. Emotional exhaustion is the most well-known inverse indicator of physician's well-being [25]. 50.0% of the physicians included in the study had a high level of emotional exhaustion. At the same time, high emotional exhaustion was significantly more common in female physicians than in male physicians (55.3% vs. 16.7%). Every third physician had a high level of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishments (34.1% and 37.5%, respectively; these two parameters did not have significant gender-related differences).

Stress is a leading factor in the development of burnout syndrome. This study clearly demonstrates high levels of stress in primary care physicians. Increased levels of stress (VAS $\geq$ 5) was observed in 92.3% of physicians; high stress (VAS $\geq$ 7) in  $^2$ 3 of physicians; and every fourth specialist had the highest possible level of stress (VAS 9–10). At the same time, the proportion









**Table 2.** Comparative assessment of four domains of quality of life of outpatient physicians

Domains of quality of life		Score	
Domain 1	Physical health	54.3 ± 10.1	
Domain 2	Psychological health	63.2 ± 11.0	
Domain 3	Social relations	71.3 ± 17.5	
Domain 4	Environment	$60.8 \pm 14.3$	

The data are expressed as the mean and standard deviation  $(M \pm SD)$ .

of female physicians with the high and highest possible levels of stress (VAS) is significantly higher than that of male physicians. This data are consistent with the findings by Rybina [28]. They show that female physicians experience professional stress 1.5 times more often than male physicians. Women seem to be more sensitive to stress factors when performing activities that require empathy.

Currently, the pathogenesis of burnout syndrome in health care professionals is not limited only to stress, which represents only one of the scenarios of developing the burnout syndrome. Depressive symptoms, which are often combined with burnout syndrome, have a significant role.

According to our data, 39.1% of primary care physicians presented anxiety and/or depressive symptoms of any level, and 10.2% had clinically pronounced anxiety and/or depression. The proportion of male physicians with clinically pronounced depressive symptoms was significantly higher than among female

physicians (25.0% vs. 2.6%; p=0.023). The proportion of physicians who assessed their quality of life as worse than good was 42.0%. About the same number of physicians (41.6%) were not satisfied with their health (and chose the answer «worse than good»).

The data obtained in this study is consistent with the findings of several earlier publications. Oliveira et al. [29] observed that depressive symptoms occurred in 22% of American anesthesiologists, while another 17% were at high risk of developing burnout and depression. One in five pediatrician interns were shown to have signs of depression, and three in four physicians had signs of the burnout syndrome. Sonneck et al. also confirmed a higher prevalence of depressive disorders in female health care professionals [31]. Suicide (an extreme manifestation of depression) was reported in Austrian male physicians, which was 50% more often than in female physicians.

In 2012, the European General Practice Research Network Burnout Study Group (EGPRN) actively studied the degree and characteristics of burnout in family doctors in 12 European countries [32].

The researchers analyzed the demographic characteristics, lifestyle, length of employment, and job satisfaction, as well as the standard Maslach burnout questionnaire. Only 1/3 of family doctors did not show emotional burnout; 43% of participants had signs of emotional exhaustion; 35% had signs of depersonalization; while 32% had reduced personal accomplishments. 12% of doctors showed signs of burnout in all three scales. According to the authors,

**Table 3.** Age-specific and length-of-employment-specific features of the psychological status, burnout syndrome, and quality of life of outpatient physicians

Score	Age, years		_	Length of employment, years		-				
Score	Younger than 40	41 and older	P	Less than 10	11 or more	p				
Burnout syndrome										
Emotional exhaustion	24.6±9.9	24.9±9.3	n/s	24.0±9.3	25.3±9.7	n/s				
Depersonalization	8.4±4.4	7.7±5.5	n/s	8.7±4.9	7.4±5.3	n/s				
Reduced personal accomplishments	32.8±7.1	31.5±6.1	n/s	31.8±7.3	32.2±5.8	n/s				
Level of stress										
Level of stress (VAS)	7.0±2.1	7.2±2.3	n/s	7.0±2.1	7.3±2.1	n/s				
Anxiety and depressive symptoms										
HADS-A score	5.1±3.6	4.5±3.4	n/s	4.9±3.7	4.7±3.3	n/s				
HADS-D score	4.7±3.7	5.0±3.1	n/s	4.9±4.0	5.0±2.7	n/s				
Quality of life										
Quality of life	3.8±0.5	3.4±0.8	0.001	3.8±0.7	3.4±0.7	0.01				
Very satisfied with physical health	3.5±0.8	3.3±1.0	n/s	3.4±1.0	3.3±1.0	n/s				

The data is expressed as the mean and standard deviation ( $M \pm SD$ ). VAS, visual analog scale; n/s, not significant.



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ПОКАЗАНИЯ К ПРИМЕНЕНИЮ × дотремальная гонираризача или иншеническая больственно-праворам наприятильного применения и предустательного и предустательно тией; совместное применение с комбинированными лекарственными препаратами, содержащими вапсартам - санубитрии (см. разден-в Замилодействие с другими лекарственными средствами» и «Особъе указания»); заст (кл. разден «Замилодействие с другими лекарственными средствами» и поетельной трего инфаркта мискарда, пос (включая кардиогенный; обструкция выходного тракта левого желудожи (включая кардиогенный; обструкция выходного тракта с пределами и пределами (стемов уструкция) (стемов уструк Неитроления/агранулоцитост/ромбоцитоления/анемия. С кражней осторожностью применять периндоприл у пациенто в системными мая липретивлу Упациентов с другоронним стемоом поченных агрерий или агрерии единственной почим возрастатую дазвития изменении концентрации креатинния у пациентов с одностронним стенозом поченной артерии. Двойная блокада РААС с обекомендуется, Портиволожалом применение интелиторов АПВ с котом досижа покада РААС не вкомендуется, Портиволожалом применение интелиторов АПВ с котом досижа покада РААС не вкомендуется, Портиволожалом применение интелиторов АПВ с котом дозвития с АРА III и содержание К' в сыворотке крови. Прехоращая артериальная гилотензия не является препятствием для дальнейшего примем препара-милатия. С осторожностью, Нарушение функции почек, Пациентам с КК менее 60 ми/мин рекомендуется индивидуальный подбор доз ий возможно повышение мочевины и креатинина в крови. Наличие реноваскулярной гипертензии обусловливает повышенный риск тяжелой цидозом, совместным применением к<sup>-</sup>-соерегающих диуретиков, солеи к-. *сахарныи диаоет.* в течение первог ы. Увеличение дозы с осторожностью. **ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ С ДРУГИМИ ЛЕКАРСТВЕННЫМИ СРЕДСТВАМИ\***. *Со*г одительной применений произвольного по применений прим теринумаетти, д. ондренопожаторы (правазаны, альфузоаны, доказазаны, такжитиры, принадалиятини), силатомиметики, предараты золота, аллогуринол, просанаемия, такколимуе, (ценоспорны, сименстичны, регуриную в систем в принадалиятини, видалиятини, видалиятини, видалиятини, онараты золота, аллогуринол, просанаемия, такколимуе, (ценоспорны, сименстичны, регуриную в систем в принадалиятини, принадалиятини, онараты в принадалиятини в принадалиятини, онараты в принадалиятини в принадали в принадали в принадали в принадали в принадали в принадали в





the degree of burnout is closely related to the country of residence, job satisfaction, alcohol, smoking, and the use of psychotropic drugs, male gender, and age [18].

An analysis of the individual components of burnout revealed specific gender-related differences. It was found in this study that female physicians had significantly higher emotional exhaustion scores. Other studies showed that male physicians had depersonalization scores [33]. Men appear to be dominated by instrumental values, while women are guided by emotional values. They are more responsive to patients' complaints and are more susceptible to stress. At the same time, in several studies no gender-related particularities of burnout syndrome were observed [34].

The analysis of age-related characteristics carried out in certain studies showed that health care professionals above 40 years of age, with 15 years or more of employment, are most susceptible to burnout [35, 36]. Other studies revealed little negative correlation between the prevalence of burnout syndrome, years of employment [37] and age [13]. del Carmen et al. [38] in their recent study established that young health care professionals with less than 10 years of employment after graduation were more susceptible to burnout (OR 1.36; 95% CI 1.05–1.77). Doctors with a longer length of employment, more than 30 years after graduation, were less susceptible to burnout (OR 0.59; 95% CI 0.40–0.88) when compared to doctors with an average length of employment (11–20 years).

One of the limitations of this study is that it included only polyclinics whose managers authorized the study, and whose physicians who agreed to participate in the study.

Although this sample is random, it is not entirely representative of all outpatient physicians. Another limitation is the discrepancy in modern scientific literature regarding cut-off points for assessing bur-

nout syndrome and its components. According to a range of data, the prevalence of burnout syndrome in the general population of health care professionals ranges from 0 to 80.5%; emotional exhaustion from 0 to 86.2%; depersonalization from 0 to 89.9%; and reduced personal accomplishments from 0 to 87.1%. Due to discrepancies in the definition of burnout syndrome criteria, an accurate assessment of the prevalence of burnout syndrome and its correlation with gender, age, length of employment, the specialties of physicians, and the presence of depressive symptoms, is still rather vague. A harmonized definition of burnout syndrome and standardize its assessment needs to be established.

#### Conclusion

The study revealed a high prevalence of personal factors potentially affecting the professional activities of outpatient physicians (district primary care physicians, general practitioners, and cardiologists): a high level of stress; anxiety and depressive symptoms; burnout syndrome; unsatisfactory quality of life; and low satisfaction with one's own health. These factors can adversely affect health care professionals and the quality of medical care. Management decisions need to be taken and measures implemented, in order to create the best possible psychological climate for physicians in the workplace. New strategies need to be developed for the prevention and correction of physicians' psychological state, and comprehensive programs aimed at improving the professional environment need to be introduced, in order to preserve and strengthen mental health and increase the professional prestige of the medical profession.

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