



Clinician Burnout in Rural & Tribal Communities

Working in rural and tribal areas provides unique opportunities for practicing medicine. Delivering care to a smaller patient population can foster deeper connections to the community and allow clinicians to engage in a broader scope of practice. However, these can also present unique challenges that clinicians should be prepared to experience.



Factors Contributing to Burnout in Rural and Tribal Settings

Small care teams and fewer support staff

Having fewer members of the care team may require clinicians to spend more time on documentation, following up with patients, and connecting patients to services among other tasks.

Professional isolation

In smaller communities, clinicians may have fewer opportunities to engage with peers in similar roles.

Deep community connection and lack of boundaries

Working in a smaller community means seeing the outcomes of your efforts in the community and in your patients' lives. However, this also means fewer boundaries between work and life.

Broad scope of practice

Working in rural or tribal areas can afford the opportunity to work to a provider's full scope of practice, but this could also result in needing to provide care in specialties where the provider feels they lack expertise.

Lack of resources to support culturally competent care

Clinicians may have fewer resources or colleagues that can assist in the delivery of culturally appropriate care (e.g., aligning care with Indigenous values).

Discontinuity of care

Delivering care in rural and tribal areas can present challenges in ensuring adequate levels of care are met (e.g., hospital and specialty care).

What are some ways that clinicians in rural and tribal areas can prevent burnout?

References

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Get out into the community: Engaging in community events and activities and can build a greater understanding of cultural values and culturally appropriate care. Learn from the traditional and cultural practices that have shaped the resilience of the community.

Build relationships with colleagues: Regular group discussions with colleagues can reduce depersonalization and emotional exhaustion.

Practice work/life balance by setting boundaries: In addition to taking breaks throughout the work day to practice self-care, identify opportunities to increase efficiency so that you can leave work a reasonable time.

Take advantage of your geographic setting: Spending time in nature can help you disconnect from work and reenergize.

Join professional associations: Professional associations provide many opportunities for networking and professional development. HRSA supports state and national associations and networks that provide free networking and professional development opportunities.

