

Episode 239: Determined: How Burned Out Doctors Can Thrive in a Broken Medical System with Dr. Jimmy Turner

On this episode: Dr. Jimmy Turner and Dr. Jed Wolpaw

In this 239th episode I welcome Dr. Jimmy Turner back to the show. Jimmy is an academic anesthesiologist at Wake Forest in North Carolina and a certified coach for physicians. He is also the founder of The Physician Philosopher blog and podcast. In addition to this, he is the author of a book that came out in July of 2022 entitled *Determined: How Burned Out Doctors Can Thrive in a Broken Medical System*. We discuss his book and its messages about burnout and resilience.

Questions & Notes

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What was the impetus behind writing the book?

Describe the process when writing/publishing this book.

Was it difficult to share your own personal stories/challenges?

What are the causes of burnout?

Can you define moral injury?

What do you mean by self-determination?

What is the “arrival fallacy”?

How do you deal with arrival fallacy?

How can you deal with impostor syndrome?

How do we take back our autonomy?

Is unionization in our future?

How can we get our systems more people-focused?

What would you recommend to a provider to quickly increase their wellness?

What was the impetus behind writing the book?

2:00

- At first Dr. Turner's tagline was "fighting burnout with financial independence", but he then realized he was burned out himself, and that money was not the answer. After his own journey with burnout, coaching other doctors in the same position, figuring out different methods to deal with burnout, and the systemic problems in medicine, he decided to write this book.

Describe the process when writing/publishing this book.

4:20

- Started with the big picture: what is this book, and who am I trying to help?
- What the book is:
 - #1: Wanted to look at what is systemically broken in medicine and how that impacts doctors.
 - #2: What can doctors do until that system is fixed.
- Who am I trying to help?
 - The individual doctor.
- Dr. Turner didn't decide to self-publish or go with the traditional publishers, but went with a company called Scribe which was something in between those 2 options.
 - Ultimately he was still able to own the rights to his writing while also having assistance with promotion and other logistics of publishing a book.

Was it difficult to share your own personal stories/challenges?

9:20

- No. Dr. Turner feels he has always been an honest and transparent person. He feels it is important to share the struggles, and show that not everything is perfect like what social media likes to portray.

What are the causes of burnout?

11:25

- There are a variety of systemic problems in medicine: EMR, insurance companies, bureaucrats and administrators. These problems strip doctors of certain things (see below), which can cause the individual phenomenon of burnout. The problematic system causes moral injury, which can lead to the individual doctor experiencing burnout.
- The systemic problems can strip doctors of:
 - **Autonomy** (administrators, insurance companies)
 - **Belonging** ("cog-in-the-wheel", not feeling valued)
 - **Competence** (imposter syndrome)

Can you define moral injury?

16:00

- Moral injury is the phenomenon when you as the medical doctor know what the correct way to help someone is, but the system does not allow you. There are many ways in which this can happen (e.g. stubborn EMRs, insurance denials, staff shortages etc.), but ultimately lead the physician to feeling helpless.

What do you mean by self-determination?

17:55

- Composed of 3 things (“ABCs”), which are further broken down into 5
 - Autonomy
 - Personal autonomy
 - Professional autonomy
 - Belonging/relatedness
 - Being a valued team member
 - Attached to a deeper purpose
 - Competence
 - Perceived competence

What is the “arrival fallacy”?

22:00

- Term first coined by Harvard psychologist Tal Ben-Shahar.
- The idea that “when we get there, everything will be better.”
- Instead of living in the moment, focusing on the dopamine hit when you arrive at the destination (that may not come).

How do you deal with arrival fallacy?

25:50

- “Writers are happiest when they are writing, singers are happiest when they are singing, and runners are happiest when they are running.” It is not always about the end product, but about the journey.

How can you deal with impostor syndrome?

29:30

- Normalize it, recognize that this is something almost everyone deals with.
- Call it what it is: a perceived lack of competence. Self compassion is the antidote.
- Be kind to yourself. What would you say to someone else in the same position?

How do we take back our autonomy?

36:40

- On the systemic front: banding together to fight against certain groups (e.g. political groups).
- On the personal front: personal finance and mindset.

Is unionization in our future?

43:40

- It may not be under the term “union”, but Dr. Turner feels that at one point in the future physicians have to band together to fix some of these systemic problems, otherwise people will stop entering medicine and/or leave altogether.

How can we get our systems more people-focused?

51:00

- Dr. Turner doesn't believe the ones running the current systems have any malicious intent towards doctors. He believes these administrators just need to have these issues brought more to their attention, with concrete numbers/facts.

What would you recommend to a provider to quickly increase their wellness?

53:00

- The purpose of the book is for the reader to go from an unintentional mindset, to an intentional mindset. Relabelling yourself from the victim of a situation, into the hero of a situation.
 - The quickest way to do this, is to get an **outside opinion**. This can be coaching, counseling, or just any third person perspective.
 - Another method is to write down what is bothering you (a **thought download**). Then circle and delineate what is fact and what is perspective. A lot of the time we confuse negative perspectives about ourselves as facts.

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