

## From Fatigue to Fitness: A Physician's Perspective

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### Abstract

Fatigue is an oft-mentioned professional hazard of a physician's life. For the physician, fatigue is a multifactorial and multifaceted syndrome. This affects their own health, and that of their patients. Decisions taken during a state of fatigue may be suboptimal, and may lead to undesirable outcomes. We classify fatigue as the 4 Cs – corporeal (bodily), cognitive, communication (vocal) and compassion fatigue. We suggest a simple 5S model to prevent and manage fatigue – Self-awareness, Strengthening oneself, Strengthening the health care system/team, as well as improving Scheduling/Staggering one's workload, while modifying the Style and strategy of working.

**Keywords:** Fatigue, Tiredness, Self awareness

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### Introduction

Fatigue is a corollary of hard work, and is an oft-mentioned professional hazard of a physician's life. The science of ergonomics, which aims to maximize productivity, also works to minimize fatigue at the workplace.<sup>1</sup> For the physician, fatigue is a multifactorial and multifaceted syndrome.<sup>2,3</sup> This affects not only their own health, but that of their patients as well. Fatigue worsens quality of life, contributes to premature onset of disease, and may impact longevity as well. Decisions taken during a state of fatigue may be suboptimal, and may lead to undesirable outcomes.

### Simple Solutions

While it is difficult to escape fatigue, especially for the overworked South Asian physician, it is not difficult to manage it. Table 1 lists the various types of tiredness-physical, mental, vocal and emotional- that a physician may face. Awareness of these is important, because this helps plan and curative interventions. The physician should be able to perform an ABC (antecedents, behaviour, consequences) analysis, so as to pinpoint the exact etiopathogenesis, contributory factors and consequences

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**Table-1:** The 4 Cs of Physician Fatigue.

- Corporeal fatigue-physical fatigue, tiredness, aches and pains
- Cognitive fatigue- difficulty in concentration, thinking, decision-making
- Communication fatigue-voice fatigue, dry mouth, dry cough
- Compassion fatigue-inability to feel and express empathy

**Table-2:** The 5 Ss of Prevention of Physical Fatigue.

- Self-awareness
  - Map one's strengths and weaknesses
  - Map one's circadian rhythm
- Sensible scheduling
  - Pragmatic pacing: frequent breaks (20'/20", 60'/60", 180'/180")
  - Staggering work according to capacity (over day, week, month)
- Style and strategy
  - Sequential tasking instead of multitasking
  - Schedule according to circadian rhythm
- Strengthen yourself
  - Optimize physical, social, emotional health
  - Continued medical education/competency building
  - Practice patience, perseverance
- Strengthen the system
  - Build a strong team
  - Build bonds with the team.

of fatigue.

A simple self-analysis, coupled with inputs from colleagues (and patients) can help define the cause and consequences of fatigue. This allows crafting of a preventative strategy, designed to minimize tiredness and optimize outcomes.

Self awareness leads to sensible scheduling, or pragmatic pacing of one's work. We understand that all physicians may not be able to plan their work timetables. It is incumbent upon senior colleagues to assess the strengths and weaknesses of junior workers, and decide their job responsibilities accordingly. Simple changes in style and strategy, such as staggering one's workload, and taking on tasks in a sequential manner (rather than simultaneous multitasking), can help minimize fatigue.<sup>4,5</sup>

At the same time, one should pay attention to self-health, and work to improve physical as well as psychosocial fitness. Similar focus should also be laid on the health care team, by ensuring intra-professional bonding. This allows for greater efficacy and efficiency.

### Summary

This simple rubric is a fatigueless way of planning one's work, so as to prevent fatigue and promote fitness at work.

We welcome best practices from our readers which will assist in improving our ergonomic effectiveness at work. This will help not only us, but the patients and society that we serve as well.

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