

Tawny Welsh I am a Physician Assistant

I want to thank the Oregon leaders who are here. I am here to add my voice to the chorus of providers telling anyone who will listen that there is a crisis in healthcare. This was not caused by Covid or a triplendemic. Healthcare systems have been systematically stripping hospitals of their primary resource, the providers.

The unprecedented demand on this resource, us, during Covid and the triplendemic were merely the tipping point that pushed an already precarious system beyond its ability to compensate.

Until six months ago I was a Neurosurgery Physician Assistant, a career specialty I have been in for 10 years and believed I would continue until my retirement. However I am now one of over 230,000 clinicians who quit their job as of August last year. [1] Like many of my colleagues, I came to the heartbreaking conclusion that my job conditions had become untenable. The system has pushed these people past their breaking point, and that should worry you.

I'd like to read you an excerpt from an email I sent on behalf of my mid-level department to leadership in August of 2021

How can we possibly be spread thinner and still provide adequate care AND access? I am afraid for our patients; I am frustrated that our pleas for help seem to be falling on deaf ears and I am deeply saddened because I feel our ethical obligation and moral compulsion to care for our patients is being taken advantage of. We have continued to try and work harder and faster, see more patients in shorter amounts of time and it is unsustainable and dangerous. I love this job and I am here to help make this department better, but understand I cannot sustain the current situation, I cannot sacrifice my mental health and well being for much longer.

In my experience, when a system recognizes the demand for access and care is exceeding staffing capacity and we ask for more staffing we are repeatedly rejected. In response, just like nurses and techs and CNA's everywhere, we step up to meet the increasing demands of patient care by stretching ourselves further, in order to continue providing quality care to our patients. We did this willingly during the pandemic because it was necessary, because it was unprecedented, because it was a crisis, But it is not sustainable, it should not be the baseline of our work in the hospital. When we are pushed to perform under the strain of minimal staffing every day without end there is no more capacity to go above because we are already pushed beyond.

[1] Hailey Mensik Published Oct. 26, 2022 *Over 200,000 healthcare workers quit jobs last year*
HealthcareDive parent company Informa PLC accessed 1/30/23
[<https://www.healthcaredive.com>]