

# SPEAKOUT

THE MAGAZINE FOR AUSTRALIAN SPEECH PATHOLOGISTS

DECEMBER 2020

## Speechie Library Talks 2020

PROTECTING YOUR  
STAFF FROM BURNOUT

## Speech pathology in education

National Early  
Language and  
Literacy Strategy

Virtual  
Conference  
News

Living and  
working in  
"COVID normal"

# Protecting your staff from burnout



**S**tress is a work health and safety (WHS) risk factor. When workplace stress is high and prolonged, it can cause burnout.

Burnout is specifically an occupational syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. The World Health Organisation says burnout has three main characteristics:

- chronic exhaustion
- cynicism or disconnection towards one's job and
- a reduced sense of professional capability or accomplishment.

Employers are legally responsible for ensuring that the working environment does not harm employee mental health or worsen an existing condition.

If you run a private practice, you have a legal duty to protect your staff from burnout. This involves protecting your staff from prolonged exposure to workplace stress-factors, such as:

- unreasonable job demands and low role clarity
- poor management and inadequate support
- poor workplace communication and relationships
- poor organisational change management
- workplace bullying, harassment and discrimination
- violence, trauma or abuse.

To help protect your staff from burnout, private practice owners can incorporate these key considerations into your workplace mental health strategy:

## **Regular and good communication**

Clear, timely communication with your staff is crucial.

Give and receive feedback regularly and take the time to unpack what an employee is saying and feeling. Keep your staff informed on what is happening in the business, how you are handling issues, and what this means for them and their job. During times of change or adversity, boost your level of communication and follow your change management strategy. Remember that employers have an obligation to consult with staff on significant changes in the workplace.

## **Team cohesion and recognition**

To maintain positive morale and healthy team relationships, look for ways to get to know your staff and build a sense of comradery. For example, try a daily check-in, a weekly morning tea or a monthly social activity. Celebrate individuals and the whole team for their efforts and always acknowledge good work and exemplary conduct. It is also important to consider opportunities for shared clinical decision making in your practice. Making difficult decisions in isolation on an ongoing basis can become a workplace stress-factor.

## **Strong leadership and HR protocols**

It is important to inspire your team, remind them of the organisational vision and values, and role model respectful, inclusive behaviour in your private practice. Reduce stigma and create a culture of support by showing that it's okay to speak up about mental health and take steps to care for your own mental wellbeing. Make sure your HR workplace policies and processes are in place, including your mental health strategy and your code of conduct. Discuss your workplace culture and include WHS reminders in meetings, newsletters and policy reviews. Always address workplace conflict and promote zero tolerance for bullying, harassment and discrimination.

## Managing expectations and work demands

Practice owners should establish clear performance objectives throughout the term of employment and ensure they are providing flexible and healthy workloads, and proper training to ensure staff are confident in their abilities. Again, regular communication is important for monitoring how staff are coping and ensuring people are taking proper breaks. For a staff member who is struggling, you can work together to negotiate a temporary adjustment of their role or workload, to help them get through their rough patch.

## Mental health resources and support

It is important for private practice owners to monitor individual staff needs and know how to respond to an employee who is struggling. Pay attention to team members who may be most at risk e.g., workaholics, perfectionists, those working remotely. Look out for the warning signs and symptoms of burnout and or mental injury, such as lateness, or a drop in mood or performance. Intervene early and remind staff about the available support resources, such as an employee assistance program.

Burnout is not only a WHS hazard, it can also have a negative ripple effect throughout your private practice, potentially manifesting in absenteeism or presenteeism, poor work performance, staff turnover, poor business operations, complaints, and a toxic workplace culture. Furthermore, private practice owners can be held personally liable for failing to provide a psychologically safe workplace.

There are many good reasons to promote a culture of positive mental health and wellbeing in your private practice. To discover more tools for workplace wellness, please visit <https://www.workplaceplus.com.au/post/tools-for-workplace-wellness>

Anna Pannuzzo is the Director of WorkPlacePLUS. All SPA members, including practice owners and employees/contractors receive special member benefits with WorkPlacePLUS for support with HR & IR issues affecting your practice. For more information, contact Anna on (03) 9492 0958 or visit [www.WorkPlacePLUS.com.au](http://www.WorkPlacePLUS.com.au).



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**You're invited!**

## 6<sup>th</sup> Pacific Rim Conference 30 June - 3 July 2021

Speech pathologists are invited to [submit an abstract](#), [be informed](#) and [register](#) for the combined International Neuropsychological Society/ASSBI/CCN Conference. This hybrid (online and face-to-face) conference in Melbourne will focus on '*Putting our heads together to change lives*' for people living with brain conditions. It includes international and national keynote speakers, workshops, mini-masterclasses, 'How to' sessions, oral presentations and live and online poster sessions. We look forward to seeing you!

### Important LINKS

**Submit an abstract:** <http://www.cvent.com/c/abstracts/0fc6f2a6-f50c-447d-a78f-81973320ccbfbf>

**Website:** <https://cvent.me/xqnryR?RefId=6th>

**Register:** <https://cvent.me/mqnQ9y>

