



Clinicians' overload and pandemic

The hard blow

Vulnerability and challenges

Healthcare systems, all around the globe, are facing unprecedented challenges, some of which are driven by longer life expectancy. Current forecasts indicate that 8.6% of the total Nordic population in 2040 will be 80+. Average life expectancy is increasing in all of the countries, with women in Finland living longest – to an average of 84 which is associated to a rise in chronic diseases.

An over-burdened healthcare system

Further challenges include technological changes requiring adaptation, mismatches between healthcare workforce and patients' demands, a multiplication of regulations and protocols, and budgets restrictions.

Add to that, the "thunderbolt" of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the huge pressures being placed on an [over-burdened](#) healthcare system. A critical healthcare [concern](#) placing significant disruptive pressure on health systems across the globe caused healthcare organisations to urgently organise the workplace and immediately adapt to new ways of working to ensure a continuity of care during a tense and scary atmosphere.

Healthcare professions are deemed to be demanding and stressful, with serious consequences if inaccurate decision-making impacts patient care. Commitment and empathy are considered the main qualities of positive work behaviour among health workers and are vital for healthcare organisations due to their correlation with the quality and safety of patient care and the patient-clinician relationship.

Nurses and doctors are affected by a variety of stressors in their workplaces because of their responsibility to provide the best treatment and service to patients. Intense personal commitment, maintain the quality of healthcare following the adage "primum non nocere", scarcity of resources, immense strain, [never-ending working hours](#), loads of red tape and tremendous admin burden generate an extreme fatigue of healthcare professionals, all around the globe.

Cumulative exhaustion and increased overload cause burnout.

In his original 1974 article, the psychiatrist Herbert Freudenberger describes the state of being burned out as "becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources in the workplace" (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 159). Far worse than usual fatigue, burnout makes it challenging for healthcare teams to handle day-to-day responsibilities especially in pandemic time resulting in dissatisfaction, poor quality of care and potential errors that can sometimes have serious implications.

[WHO](#) declared burnout as an occupational phenomenon in the International Classification of Diseases 11th revision (ICD-11), recognising burnout as a serious health issue. "Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed." Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.

Frustration, fear, uncertainty, stress and work overload go hand-in-hand with exhaustion. Doctors, nurses and allied healthcare professionals are facing severe tiredness symptoms with serious consequences for themselves, for the patients, for their colleagues and for their healthcare organisations.

"Clinician burnout and stress are issues in Finland. There are many factors driving these issues. Generally, people, who are working in healthcare want to do a good job, so personality is one factor. Other issues are the workload, the long work hours, depending on the field of medicine."

— Dr Tanja Laukkala, Acting Chief Psychiatrist
HUS Helsinki University Hospital, Finland

Overload and burnout feelings in the workplace is at an all-time high among clinicians

The phenomenon of overload and [exhaustion](#), recognised in several countries as a [moral injury](#), worsens as the health situation deteriorates, the burden of administrative tasks increases, and the working hours never end. A [study](#) on doctors' work hours in Sweden "Their impact on sleep, health, work-family balance, patient care and thoughts about work", reported high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion (burnout).

Recent studies showed also that clinicians in the Nordic countries believe that their working hours negatively affect their own health, the number of healthcare professionals [quitting](#) their job is worrying after almost a year battling the pandemic. Healthcare staff have been left exhausted.

"Stress, burnout and other mental health challenges is a huge and partly understated problem. Such issues arise when clinicians are not being able to cope sufficiently with the high demands, workload, responsibilities and fast pace in their day-to-day clinical work."

— Lene Søvold, Clinical Psychologist, Mental Health Advisor, Sweden / Norway

"In Sweden, stress is rising amongst physicians, especially among women doctors. It is a huge issue in Sweden."

— Dr. Pia Dellson, Senior Consultant in Medical Oncology and Psychiatry
Lund University Hospital, Sweden

"Studies have shown that burnout and stress is an issue in healthcare in Sweden and elsewhere too. If anything, this is an understatement, and all the clinicians know this is an issue. As a nurse, who has worked in two big hospitals in Stockholm, I have seen it myself. The working days are way too stressful. As a nurse, you have too much to do, and you are expected to do several things at once. The responsibility is very, very heavy and the working environment makes the days even more stressful."

— Sara Heyman, Swedish Nurse and Journalist who wrote
"Sick, sister! Love and rebellion in Swedish health care"

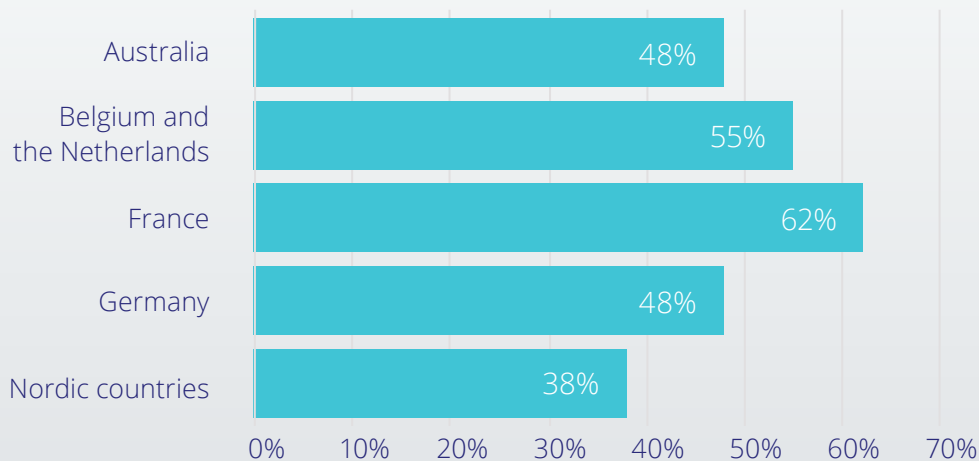
"Clinician burnout is an issue in Holland, and it is now getting a lot of attention here. It was always stressful being a doctor but now it is worse, especially this year with Covid."

— Dr Esther Bloemheugel, Clinician in training with a residency in orthopaedic surgery in Sint Maartenskliniek, the Netherlands

Clinicians' overload

That widely shared feeling of exhaustion among clinicians in Europe and Australia has been heightened by long-standing concerns about staff shortages, and by deep resentment - particularly among nurses - about pay and conditions as stated in 2021 HIMSS and [Nuance communications study](#) across Europe and Australia. The research found that clinicians admit that overload is soaring, the workload being a source of stress and, in turn, leads to burn out, especially with the COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the overload/burnout feeling as reported by the surveyed clinicians across Europe and Australia.



"The existing workload is a daily issue in Finnish healthcare and it already was before the COVID-19 crisis. Lots of studies demonstrate this workload: one questioning 45 physicians in 2016 shows f.i.g that doctors feel they have more work than they can tolerate."

— Leena Setälä, Sustainability Director at Hospital District of Southwestern Finland and Development Director at Health Campus Turku, Finland

"Covid has obviously massively increased the level of stress and work that clinicians have had to do."

— Dr Afzal Chaudhry, Director of Digital at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, United Kingdom

"The high level of activity, which is expected from doctors, is creating stress in Denmark. Covid has affected our way of thinking and working because we have had to look more closely at our patients to see which ones we need to contact urgently."

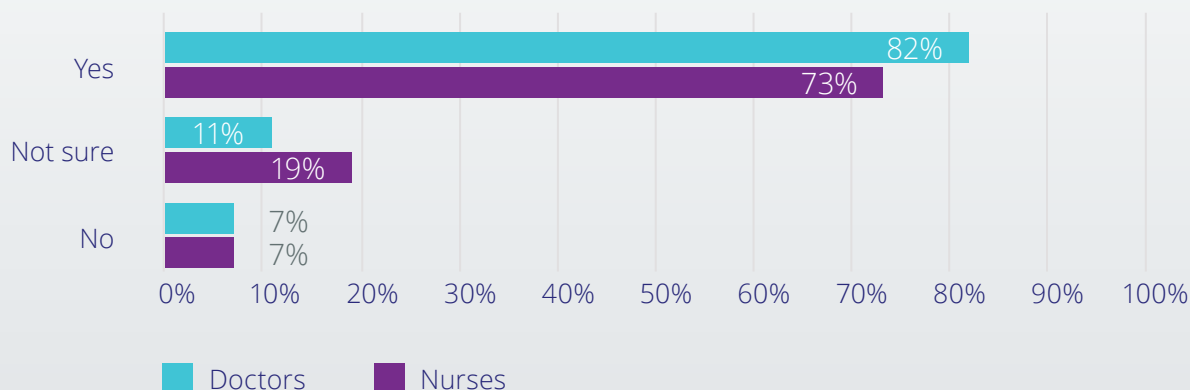
— Dr. Helena Domínguez, Cardiology Consultant University Hospital of Bispebjerg and Frederiksberg Hospital (BFH) and Associate Professor Department of Biomedicine, Copenhagen, Denmark

Time constraints and more data to enter

Over the past years, however, the pressure of time has greatly increased, in both breadth and range. Clinicians lack the time to care for their patients. In the current practice environment, they face mounting demands and new constraints in addition to documenting and charting.

The administration clinicians were tasked with before the pandemic, combined with the increased levels of procedures surrounding COVID-19, is evidently placing an unsustainable strain on the wellbeing of the healthcare workforce.

According to 2021 HIMSS and [Nuance communications](#) study in Europe and Australia, 82% of the surveyed doctors and 73% of the nurses identified the documentation burden as a key driver contributing to their overload.



“Nurses and clinicians have to comply with high reporting demands nowadays and many of this reporting goes back on clarifying what they have already done instead of the data being used forward.”

— Mette Maria Skjøth, Senior Project Manager and Registered Nurse at Odense University Hospital, Denmark

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the strain to maintain essential health services, Remote consultations in primary care were scaled up rapidly in many region including the Nordics to provide clinical support and triage without increasing the risk of transmission and to ensure continuity of care for non-COVID-19 patients.

Telehealth services, the new mode of clinicians' consultations exploded causing an increase in the general workload during the pandemic.

Harnessing AI technology to better serve clinicians—all around.

Digital transformation offers unique opportunities to strengthen health systems and meet the challenges of responding to changing health needs, such as the current epidemics of infectious and chronic diseases. Technological advancements in the health sector continue to emerge to improve patient care, assist clinicians in their daily tasks and help them adopt clinical information systems to meet the challenge of completing patient documentation and providing timely information.

This approach is in line with a dynamic to constantly improve patient care and to optimise the quality of care. Providing solutions that are compatible with leading electronic health records and applications is a necessary step to serve and enhance existing end-users' workflows without adding to the overload.

“Digital technology can have a huge potential in helping to reduce the burden of time spent on routine based, and documentation-based tasks. This will give clinicians more time to focus on the most essential tasks of their work: providing help and guidance to their patients. This will also help them reduce stress and be present with their patients, which will help in strengthening the therapeutic relationship - which can help improve the patient experience and outcome.”

— Lene Søvold, Clinical Psychologist, Mental Health Advisor
Sweden / Norway

AI-powered technology

Better serving clinicians with “intelligent” technology that can be accessed from anywhere, at any time, helps in

- reducing the time spent in front of a screen searching and typing
- saving time to spend with patients and for themselves

Clinicians can harness cutting-edge AI-powered technology to securely capture the patient's story within the EHR or any other healthcare application, improving its quality and completeness simply by speaking.

“Clinicians have been satisfied to have patient documentation immediately ready and available for everyone without having to wait for transcription process. Despite Finnish language being grammatically difficult, speech recognition accuracy has been high. Speech recognition is currently used by approximately 2500 users. Since launch, HUS has already saved several million euros.”

— Miika Pitkänen & Karri Järvelin, HUS IT Management, EFFECTIVE DRAGON MEDICAL ROLL-OUT, 2021

37%

of surveyed clinicians in Europe and Australia believe that clinical speech recognition can help ease the administrative burden.

Write just by speaking

Leveraging the power of artificial intelligence, neural networks and deep learning, [Dragon Medical One](#) is a speech recognition platform for healthcare professionals enabling clinicians to use their voice to capture efficiently and securely the patient data, anytime, anywhere.



Quality

Doctors and nurses can dictate in real time with 99% accuracy, select/apply preconfigured auto-texts according to the patient's pathology and navigate more easily through the EHRs. This results in less time spent on documenting, less administrative burden and therefore less overload.



Security

[Dragon Medical One](#) offers an optimal experience and high availability, anytime, anywhere. Microsoft Azure, the hosting infrastructure is ISO 27001 certified and GDPR compliant. All communications are encrypted.



Mobility

Doctors and nurses can create and complete patient notes anytime, anywhere, while turning their personal smartphone into a secure wireless microphone. Cleaning a smartphone is even easier than a keyboard, lowering the the risk of handheld infections.



Gateway to the future

Dragon Medical One is the precursor to DAX (Dragon Ambient eXperience), the exam room of the future where doctor-patient conversation is automatically written in the EHR.

“New technology does assist with improving working conditions.”

— Dr Tanja Laukkala, Acting Chief Psychiatrist
HUS Helsinki University Hospital, Finland

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STUDY

nuance.se/nordicsoverload



About Nuance Communications, Inc.

[Nuance Communications](#) (NUANCE) is a technology pioneer with market leadership in conversational AI and ambient intelligence. A full-service partner trusted by 77 percent of U.S. hospitals and 85 percent of the Fortune 100 across the globe, we create intuitive solutions that amplify people's ability to help others.

© 2021 Nuance Communications Ireland, Ltd. All rights reserved.
HC_5062_01_B, March 30, 2021_EN_NORDICS