



“Burnout in the Pathology Lab:

Are We Missing the Diagnosis?”



- *Shipra Garg, MD*
- *Phoenix Children's Hospital*

Burnout – Definition and Scope

- Defined by WHO as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.
- Under-recognized in pathology.



Consequences of Burnout

- Reduced job satisfaction and productivity.
- Diagnostic delays or errors.
- Early retirement and turnover.
- Negative effects on patient care.

Wellness – A Positive State

- Wellness = Thriving professionally and personally.
- Not merely absence of burnout.
- Includes physical, emotional, and mental well-being.



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Pathologist workload, burnout, and wellness: connecting the dots

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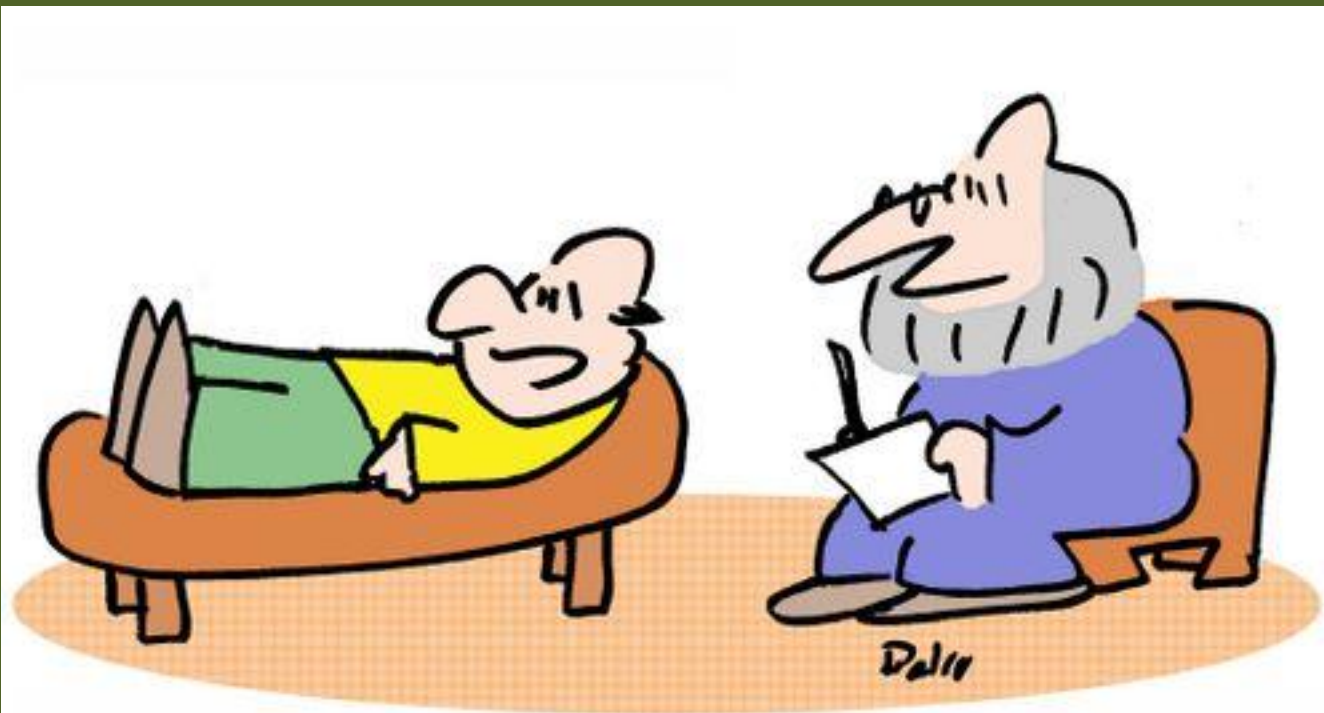
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- *“Medicine doesn’t value me.”*
- *“No one sees how hard I am working.”*
- *“I don’t get any credit for the essential work I do.”*
- *“I am invisible.”*
- *“I don’t have enough time.”*
- **CAN YOU RELATE TO THIS..?**

Workload

- In some surveys performed, Anatomic pathology work was found to be quite challenging
- Cancer checklists: burdensome and insufficiently specific
- Increased patient-care workload was coupled with increased demands for other categories of work.



"Could I be *pathologically* normal?"

Roadmap to wellness.

- Wellness is a multistep, shared responsibility.
- **Institutional**: fair workload, support systems.
- **Individual**: self-care, boundaries, awareness.
- **Systemic**: policy, staffing standards, leadership support.

1. Institutional Actions

- Monitor burnout levels.
- Adjust staffing and workload distribution.
- Encourage open dialogue about well-being
- Promotion of Autonomy
- Adequate office resources and support staff remove some workload from pathologists.
- Cultivating a collaborative work environment

Institutional level efforts

- Additionally, wellness should be identified in the organization's mission statement
- The mission statements of most healthcare institutions focus on patients and quality of care and tend to overlook **Employee wellness.**
- **An institution should prioritize patient outcome and physician satisfaction over productivity**

LEADERSHIP

- Leadership performance should be evaluated periodically by colleagues.
- A successful leader understands the motivations and unique skills of physicians .
- A leader should be involved in the work as well as administration

Suggested Institutional strategies

- Adequate communication between staff and administration
- Encourage exercise and physical activity
- Create friendlier, calmer, more cooperative work environments
- More efficient, user friendly EHR systems
- Compensation for extra working hours
- Better support resources for staff 
- Mental health support

PRODUCTIVITY PRINCIPAL

- To avoid linking salary directly to productivity.



A healthy work environment

- Allow a flexible schedule, fair compensation, and reasonable work hours.
- Transparency in workload distribution
- Accurate assessment of workload
- Hire a sufficient numbers of pathologists
- Pursuit of innovative approaches like digital pathology.

Proper Ergonomics

- If sitting, chair that provides good back and thigh support.
- Sit with your back against the back rest and your feet supported on the chair ring or footrest.
- Elevate, tilt or move the microscope closer to the edge of the counter to avoid bending your neck



2. Systemic level Effort

- The CAP Wellness Project Team surveyed CAP members to establish a baseline of where we are today.
- Based on responses from nearly 500 CAP members, results showed that 41 percent of pathologists reported experiencing at least one symptom of burnout often or all the time.
- This has serious consequences:
- 39 percent of respondents said these feelings made them consider quitting pathology
- 35 percent said burnout increased their chances of making medical errors.

CAP WEBSITE

- A long-term asset: Page on the CAP website full of wellness-related resources for pathologists.
- <https://www.cap.org/member-resources/articles/wellness-resources-for-pathologists>
- Features articles, books, courses, webinars, podcasts, social media discussions, and other resources that can help pathologists spot the signs of burnout, deal with stress, and promote their own well-being.

3. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Personal relationships
- Collegial work environment
- Work home life balance
- Religious beliefs/spiritual practice
- Healthy dietary habits
- **Physical activity**
- Awareness
- Self-care practices (e.g. physical activities, spa, socializing)

Exercise?!

**I thought you said
Extra Fries!**

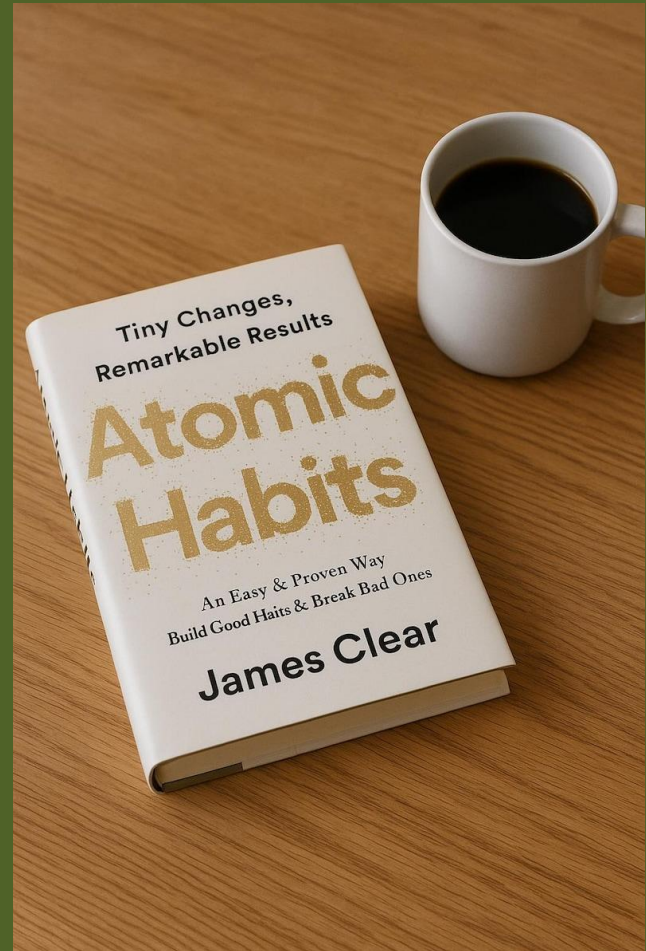
Individual-Focused **Interventions**

- Build connection with colleagues and people
- Exercise regularly
- Pursue interests
- Eat Healthy!
- Ensure work-life balance
- Focus on positive experiences
- Seek volunteer opportunities in the community



STRATEGY: MICRO HABITS

- Trick the brain:
- Lower the activation energy:
- Habit stacking:



Trick the brain: keep it so small it feels easy

- 3 squats while brushing your teeth
- Add one fruit or veggie to your lunch tray
- Write tomorrow's "shutdown thought" on a sticky note before leaving work



Lower the activation energy-shrink the barrier to starting

- Keep a protein bar in your white coat-grab instead of skipping lunch
- Place a water bottle on your desk before signing in- sip automatically
- Put your phone across the room at night-makes it easier to fall asleep and harder to doom scroll

Habit stacking-pair with something you already do

- After every handwash- roll your shoulders or take a deep belly breath
- After pouring morning coffee- glance at your day's top 3 priorities
- After changing into scrubs- set a bedtime reminder on your phone for that night



1. The 5-Minute Buffer Rule

- **Habit:** Arrive 5 minutes early to your workstation and plan your day before opening email or slides.
- **Why it works:** Reduces reactive stress and restores a sense of control.
- **Micro-action:** Write down your *Top 3 priorities* for the day.



2. One Deep-Breath Pause Between Cases

- **Habit:** Take one slow breath before opening the next case.
- **Why it works:** Interrupts stress accumulation and resets attention.
- **Micro-action:** Inhale 4 seconds, hold for 6 seconds & exhale 7 seconds.



3. The 2-Minute Movement Rule

- **Habit:** Stand, stretch, or walk every 60–90 minutes.

Why it works: Reduces physical fatigue and improves mental clarity.

Atomic/ micro action: Walk to deliver a message instead of emailing.



4. Track Energy, Not Just Productivity

- **Habit:** At lunch, rate your energy 1–10.
- **Why it works:** Burnout prevention requires awareness before exhaustion.



5. Gratitude for One Case

- **Habit:** Identify one case per day that felt meaningful.
- **Why it works:** Reconnects you to purpose — the strongest burnout buffer.



6. One Meaningful Connection Per Day

- **Habit:** Intentionally connect with one colleague daily.
Why it works: Social connection is protective against burnout.
- **Micro-action:** Ask, “How are you *really* doing?”



7. Define “Enough” for the Day

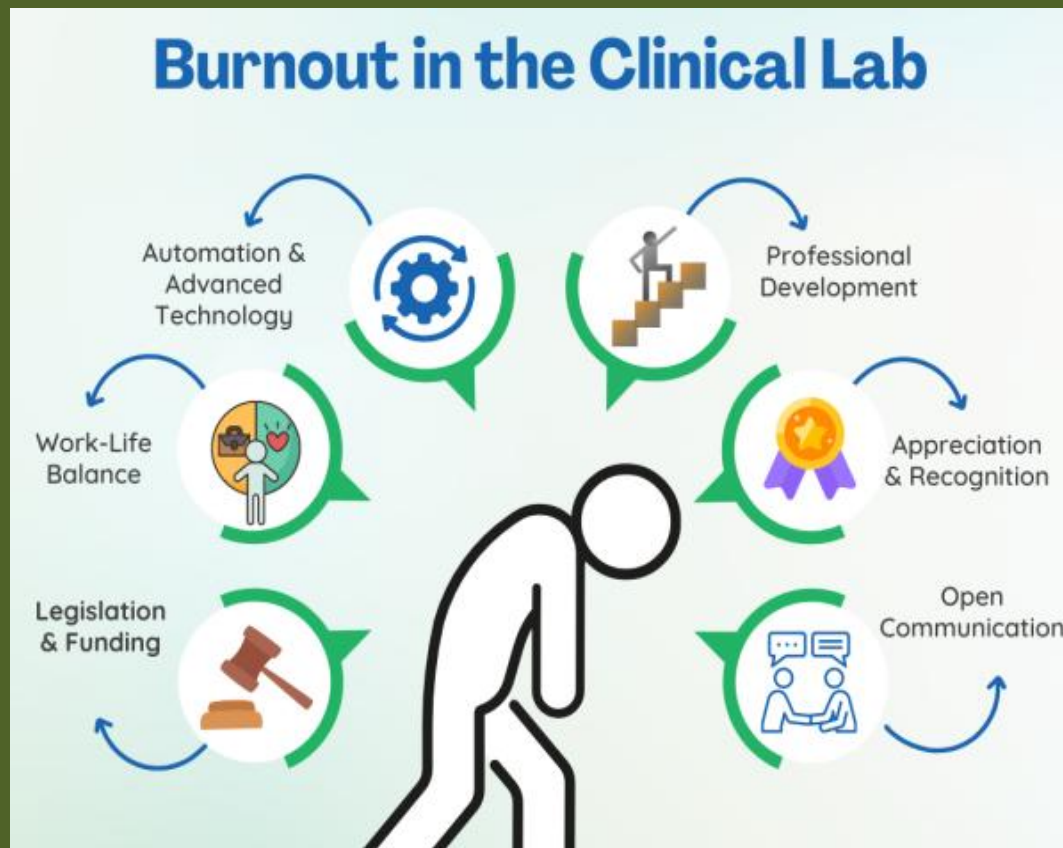
- **Habit:** Decide in advance what “done” looks like.
- **Why it works:** Prevents endless mental carryover and guilt.



8. The Shutdown Ritual

- **Habit:** End each day with a 3-minute closeout.
-
- **Micro-action:**
 - Review unfinished tasks
 - Choose tomorrow's top priority
 - Say (mentally), "Workday complete."
 - This creates psychological detachment — critical for recovery.

COMBATING BURNOUT IN THE CLINICAL LABORATORY PROFESSIONALS



Clinical lab professionals: distinct challenges

- Repetitive Precision Under Pressure
- Emotional Labor:
- Physical Strain:
- Workload Fluctuations:
- Shift Additions:
- Generalist Work Shifts:

So, how can the laboratory combat burnout and create a more sustainable environment?

- Addressing the **staffing shortage** is crucial.
- As the number of MT/MLS/CLS programs in the country dwindle down, , laboratories consistently find themselves short staffed

**Have open
conversations
about scheduling
with your staff**





**Leverage
Technology to
automate manual
tasks**

- **Focus on staff's professional development**



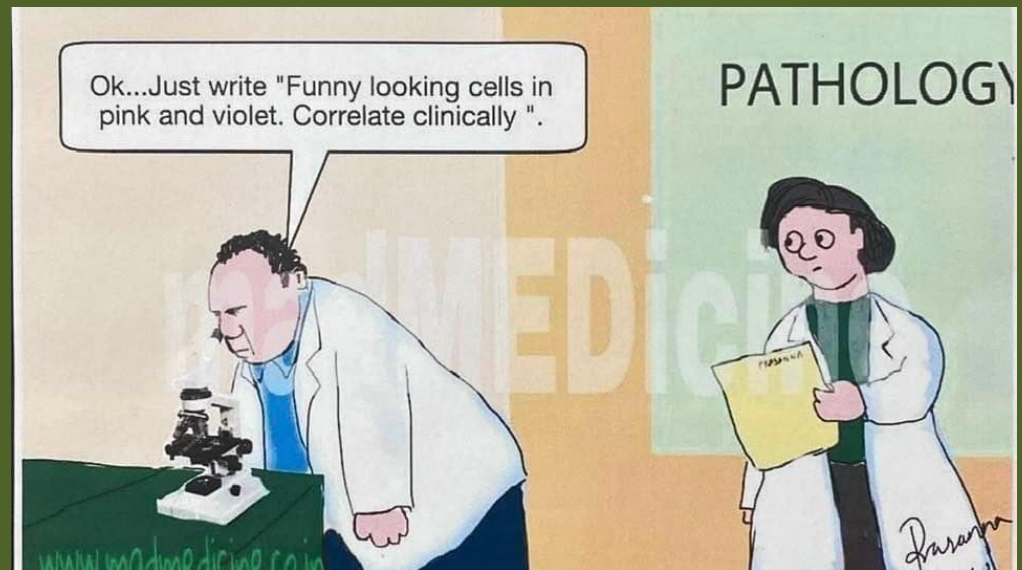
**Create and Foster
culture of appreciation**



LAB WEEK
**MEDICAL LABORATORY
PROFESSIONALS WEEK**

The Well- Pathology Resident

- *"In the current healthcare environment, residents and faculty members are at increased risk for burnout and depression. Psychological, emotional, and physical well-being are critical in the development of the competent, caring, and resilient physician. Self-care is an important component of professionalism; it is also a skill that must be learned and nurtured in the context of other aspects of residency training. Programs....have the same responsibility to address well-being as they do to evaluate other aspects of resident competence."*
- – ACGME Common Program Requirements, Section VI



Your To-Do Worklist

- You have:
- Meetings scheduled at 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM
- Tumor board at noon
- The queue is 45 cases long and growing
- The phone rings for the fifth time in as many minutes
- Someone is at your office door, again
- Softball game with the family at 5:30
- Haven't started dinner or that resolution to work out 3 times a week
- You're considering heading back to work to finish a few more cases, sleep...who has time for sleep?

Transition to New Thoughts

- “There is exactly the amount of time that I need.”
- “Everything urgent always gets done on time.”
- “If it wasn’t done today, it wasn’t urgent, and I’ll do it tomorrow.”
- Reframe challenges—**view errors as learning opportunities** rather than failures
- These thoughts may help you focus and be fully present to accomplish your planned tasks in LESS time.

The Well- Pathologist

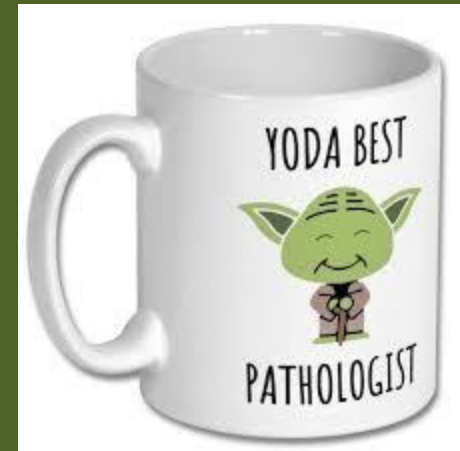
- Pathologists/ laboratorians work mostly behind the scenes.
- We have little control of our workload and tremendous pressure
- Our efforts may go unnoticed and unappreciated by our patients and even by our physician colleagues.
- Pathology is also the most highly regulated specialty in medicine
- A worsening shortage of pathologists

Digital Era

- Pathologists may enjoy flexible working hours, cross coverage, and saving time on transportation.
- However, attention is needed to dedicate a specific area at home and hours for work so that one does not mix work life with personal life.

1. Our value comes from us

- What if it's not our JOB's job to value me?
- It is **MY** job to make me feel valued.
- Our value comes from **US**.
- We are and always will be the hero of our own story.



Consider your priorities

-
- Here is a nice quotation on trying to do it all,
“We don't build the lives we want by saving time. We build the lives we want, and then time saves itself “

Tracking your time

- Random time spent on internet and messing around with your phone: Ten minutes here, 20 minutes there—we all need mental breaks, but those minutes add up.
- More importantly, these Mini-Mental vacations can hamper productivity just as much as work-related distractions.



“Long shift?”

A. Adaptability—Flexible Problem-Solving

- **Rotate tasks** during shifts to reduce monotony when possible.
- **Tech literacy**—embrace new laboratory technologies to stay engaged and efficient.

B. Purpose-Driven Mindset—Connect to Impact

- **Remember** how your work aids in diagnoses and saves lives.
- **Advocacy**—join CAP and or ASCLS committees to shape policies
- **Skill Development.** Attend webinars on stress management or time optimization.

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I'M THINKING OF CUTTING
MY HOURS DOWN TO 24/7.



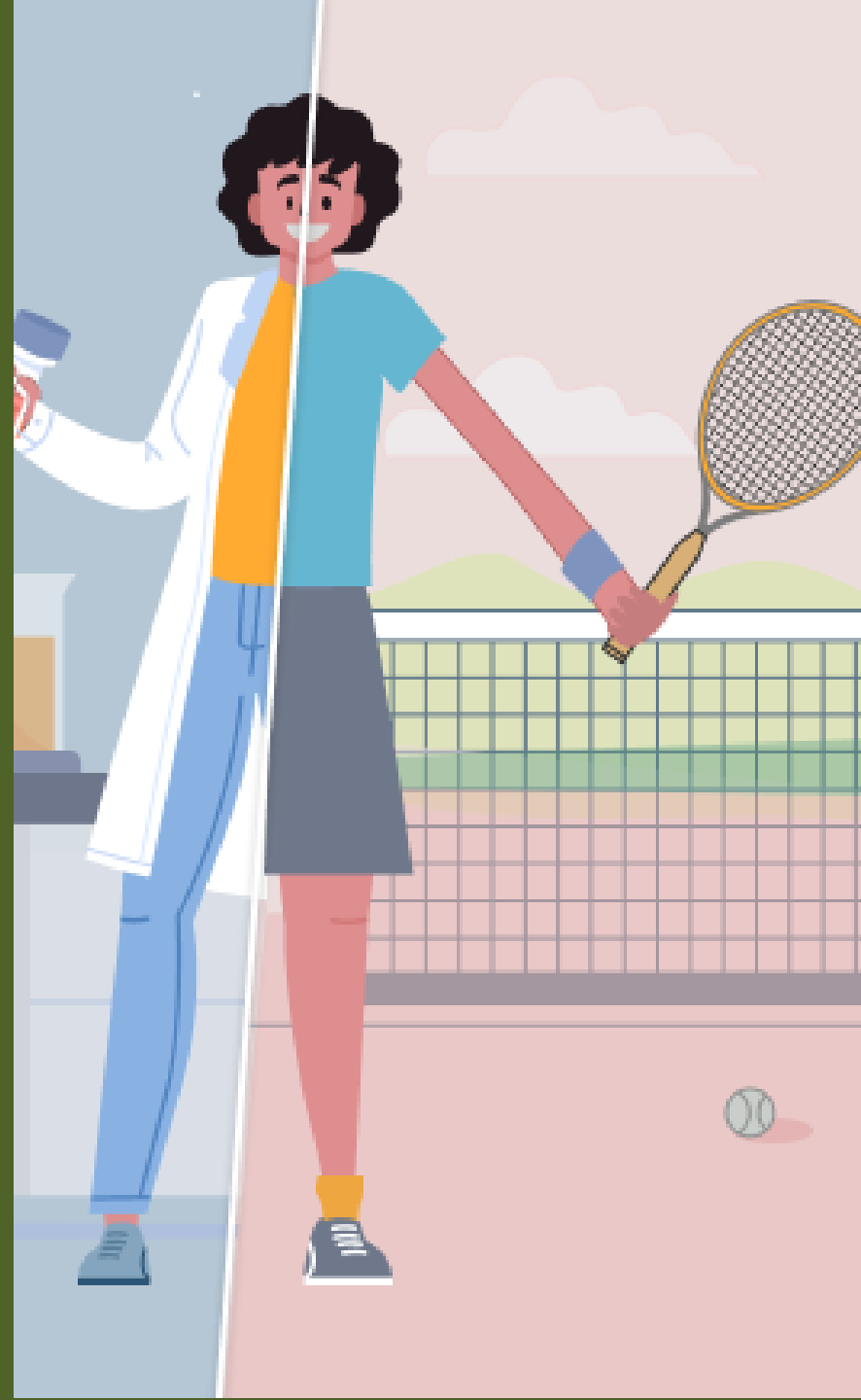
Good experiences and jobs well done

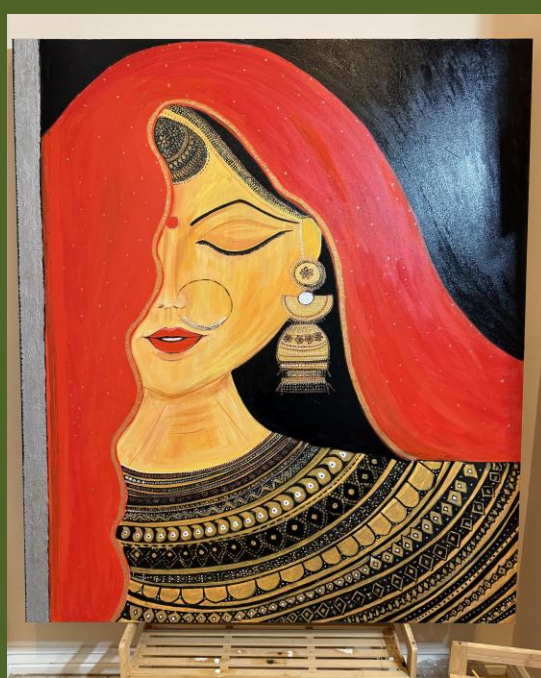
- Finally, try to actively ‘linger’ over good experiences and jobs well done
- Changing your approach may leave you feeling that time is actually on your side—at least most of the time!

Biggest Takeaway..

- ***BE KIND!***

Your Journey From an exhausted to a Well-Pathologist/ Laboratorian





Thank you!

QUESTIONS?

- Wellness link in INDEX
- <https://index.phoenixchildrens.com/Section/Wellness>