What is Burnout?
Burnout has increasingly become a “buzzword” within the medical community, but what does it mean? One recent study showed rates of burnout to be as high as 42% among medical residents (1). At the same time, a recent JAMA meta-analysis showed an incredibly wide range of prevalence among studies to date (0-85.5%) (2). This is likely due to highly variable and inconsistent definitions of what burnout truly is, as well as variability among medical careers.

The most widely used assessment is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The MBI was created in the 1980s and defines burnout with respect to three major domains: emotional exhaustion (including loss of interest, energy, and enthusiasm for practice); depersonalization (defined as the tendency to treat patients as objects and develop cynicism or blame toward patients); and low personal accomplishment (e.g. the sense that “no matter how hard I work, I am not making a difference”) (3). Other scales that are commonly used to assess burnout include the AMA Z-scale, the mini-Z, and the Oldenburg (see (4) for a thoughtful discussion of the relative benefits of different scales).

While large imaging studies have not been completed on medical professionals, neuroimaging of people with career burnout has shown increased amygdala volumes, decreased caudate volumes, and decreased amygdala and prefrontal cortex connectivity (5,6). They have also shown low morning cortisol levels consistent with the HPA dysfunction secondary to chronic stress (7), as well as impaired memory and cognition (8).

A major contemporary challenge for physician scientists is to better define and measure burnout — and what better way than by better understanding its neurobiology.
Round Table Discussion / Exercise:
Each participant should go online and complete the burnout scale of their choice. Based on ease of access, we recommend:

APA burnout assessment:
tinyurl.com/InternYear-APABurnout

AMA “mini-Z”:
tinyurl.com/InternYear-AMABurnout

After completing these scales, please discuss as a group: what was the experience like for you? Were there any particular strengths or weaknesses to the scale that you chose?

After completing this exercise, go on to the End of Rotation events.

End of Rotation Events:
Upon completion of this exercise, all participants receive +20 PH, +20 EH, +10 CP. All characters play one Life Event.

Advance the calendar by 1 month; then begin the next rotation.

References: