



Letter to the Editor in Response to “This Isn’t Being a Doctor”

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Dear Editor,

As final year medical students in London, we read Ye Kyung Song’s article on medical student burnout with great interest and would like to offer our perspective on the matter [1]. Although we agree with her conclusion that the high prevalence of burnout in medical students indicates system-wide issues, we would argue that there is a role for screening personality during medical school.

Medical students with certain personality traits may be more likely to experience burnout, for example those with low extroversion, high neuroticism and high conscientiousness [2]. From our personal experience, we feel that more neurotic medical students are overall less satisfied with medicine as a career, contributing to elevated stress levels. Our observations are echoed by a prospective 12-year longitudinal study on medical school applicants and students which found that personality, including levels of neuroticism, not only correlates to but also has a causative effect on stress, satisfaction and burnout post-graduation [3].

We therefore propose that medical schools carry out a Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) during the first year induction at medical school in order to identify students at higher risk of burnout, followed by the Maslach Burnout Inventory at the end of every year to determine actual levels of burnout. The NEO PI-R tool has previously been used to predict burnout based on personality traits [4, 5] whilst the Maslach Burnout Inventory has been widely used and shown to be reliable at determining actual burnout levels [6, 7].

The data obtained from the questionnaires would allow for targeted provisions of psychosocial training to build up protective traits and programs to improve coping and stress

management, thereby preventing or reducing the occurrence of burnout in medical students. We suggest this on the basis that such methods have been previously recommended for addressing burnout in physicians [8].

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