Almost half of the physicians in Prairie Mountain Health are reporting burnout from job demands and a lack of resources, according to the preliminary results of a study looking specifically at the health region.

The study, conducted in partnership with Prairie Mountain Health and Doctors Manitoba, indicated 49 per cent of respondents reported experiencing high or very high levels of burnout.

One of the driving factors reported is excessive job demands, such as working more...
than 40 hours a week (60 per cent reported) and being on call for more than 60 hours a week (52 per cent reported).

Abuse and mistreatment were also included, with 49 per cent reporting mistreatment by patients, 39 per cent by workplace colleagues and 26 per cent by workplace leadership.

The survey included 118 people, of which 46 per cent identified as male, 54 per cent as female and most respondents were between 35-64 years of age, with 39 per cent working in hospital-based settings.

There are 271 physicians working in PMH, according to the study.

On a positive note, 83 per cent are satisfied with their career choice, 88 per cent say they have supportive colleagues, 77 per cent say they believe they are free to ask questions and raise concerns and 73 per cent say they had a sense of co-operation.

While 88 per cent reported having supportive colleagues, 52 per cent still said they feel isolated in their job and their workplaces lack social supports. This statistic was most prevalent among physicians aged 25 to 34.

These findings are part of a progress report known as a community of practice hub and the regional health authority has been a strong active partner in gathering information, said Keir Johnson, director of strategy and communications for Doctors Manitoba.

Prairie Mountain Health is one of three health regions that has been collecting data...
since 2020 to improve physician health and wellness.

"We are really excited that Prairie Mountain Health has been an active partner," Johnson said. "I think all of the partners recognize that recruitment and retention of doctors is difficult at any point, but there are unique difficulties for rural and northern Manitoba."

The other two hubs are the Northern and Interlake Eastern health regions.

Much of the burnout reported can be traced back to physician health and wellness. Recent incidents such as emergency room closures due to staffing issues are the end result of this burnout, Johnson said.

Overall, he said this is to make sure regions have enough physicians to meet the medical needs of the people living there. To do that, they must determine why physicians are experiencing burnout, anxiety and depression. A holistic approach is going to be needed to address those issues.

While 49 per cent of physicians reporting burnout is striking, he said it is consistent with what Doctors Manitoba has been hearing from physicians across the province. What they are seeing in this preliminary data is the driving factors of that burnout.

The national average reported burnout for physicians is 39 per cent, which is listed in the survey for context.

Burnout among physicians was already an issue before the pandemic in Manitoba. Johnson said this was not well-known to the public, but the pandemic brought more attention to it and it's no surprise the numbers have worsened since the pandemic.

One aspect physicians are reporting as a concern is that they are not as involved in decision-making as they once were. The centralization of health care is leaving physicians feeling they're bound to decisions they may not completely agree with, leaving little to no flexibility in caring for their patients.

That feeling is not unique to Manitoba or Prairie Mountain Health, as it is an issue across North America, Johnson said. However, it is contributing to burnout.

The data is showing why retention is such an issue, he said, and whose fault it is, is
"In short, it’s everyone and no one," he said. "This helps everyone from employers to communities to see what is needed, especially for the younger physicians, to want to practise in a rural or northern setting. For many of them, they have to be entrepreneurs, they are starting families and buying a house. All the things young people can expect, but they have the added stress of practising medicine."

Solutions put forth by physicians are listed in the survey. Among them is addressing workload distribution, training leaders to listen to, involve and empower physicians, increasing communication and transparency from leaders, enhancing communication between colleagues and educating patients about the health-care system, as well as avoiding misinformation.

The Sun contacted Prairie Mountain Health for comment, but was told CEO Brian Schoonbaert and other contacts were meeting with stakeholders about other issues and would be unable to comment by press time.

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» kmckinley@brandonsun.com

» Twitter: @karenleighmcki1