# Time Poverty: Why Healthcare Workers Never Have Enough Hours Transcript

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Spearheaded by Dr. Jo Braid, certified professional coach and rehabilitation physician. Hello and welcome back to The Burn Out Recovery podcast.

## Time Poverty and Lunch Break Boundaries

I'm Dr Jo braid, your host and a medical doctor with over 20 years in healthcare. Today, we're tackling something I know you're feeling right now, time poverty.

That crushing sensation that there are never enough hours in the day, that you're constantly behind, constantly catching up, and constantly choosing between patient care and everything else that matters to you.

If you've ever felt like time is your enemy rather than your ally, this episode is for you! We're going to explore why healthcare workers are uniquely vulnerable to time scarcity and, more importantly, what you can do about it.

So right now I'm working a rehabilitation locum and I am living this time poverty challenge in real time. The ward is busier than usual. We haven't even got into winter yet.

And instead of the typical post-joint replacement patients, we're seeing complex medical patients who require much more time and attention. Ward rounds that used to take a couple of hours are stretching out to three or maybe four.

Documentation is more complex, and every patient interaction takes longer because of their medical complexity. And it would be so easy to fall back into that old pattern of working through lunch, staying late, letting the work expand to fill every available moment.

But here's what I've learned from my own burnout recovery journey. I've made it non-negotiable that both the intern and I take our lunch breaks every day, every single day.

Even when, and most importantly when the task list feels endless. And you know what I have noticed? When we come back from those breaks, we have better cognitive clarity than I ever remember having when I used to work through my lunch in my early career years.

We make decisions faster. We're more efficient with our documentation. And we actually get through the outstanding tasks more effectively. And this isn't just an observation, it's also evidence-based.

But it took me years to truly understand that protecting time isn' t about being lazy or uncommitted.

## Research on Time Scarcity in Healthcare

It's about be ing sustainable and effective. So I remember one particularly hectic day last week, and the intern looked at me apologetically and said, should we skip our lunch today?

There's just so much to do. And I said especially today, we need our The patients will still be here in 30 minutes, but we'll be better doctors for them if we take care of ourselves first.

And that's the mindset shift that changes everything. Understanding that time protection isn't selfish, it's strategic. We're living in what researchers call time poverty, having insufficient time to meet both work demands and personal life.

It's not just about being busy, it's about losing agency over your own life. So let's talk about the research. The research on time poverty in healthcare is sobering.

A 2023 study in the Journal of Medical Internet Research found that healthcare workers report feeling time pressured 73% more often than other professionals.

It's not just about working longer hours, though we certainly do that. Dr. Christine Sinski's work with the American Medical Association revealed that for every hour physicians spend with patients, they spend nearly two hours on administrative tasks.

Think about that, two thirds of our professional time isn't even direct patient care. But here's the crucial insight from behavioral economics research.

Time poverty creates a scarcity mindset that actually makes us less efficient. When we feel constantly behind, our cognitive bandwidth narrows. We make poorer decisions.

we're more reactive. And ironically, we waste more time. The neuroscience backs this up. Dr.

## Strategies for Protecting Time

Sendal Moulanathan's research shows that when our brains perceive time scarcity, We enter a state of tunneling, and that's hyper focusing on immediate demands while losing sight of the bigger picture.

Does that sound familiar? This explains why you might spend 20 minutes looking for a form you could have printed in two minutes or why do you stay late to finish notes instead of developing systems that would save you hours each week.

So how do we break free from time poverty? Let's share my framework, sleep, support, mindset and movement, but with specific time protection strategies.

Sleep. I invite you to start with time boundaries, not time management. So identify your non-negotiable time blocks. For me, it's 10 p.m. to 6 a. m. That is my recovery time, full stop.

I've had clients who protect their Sunday mornings. Another client protected his drive home. Absolutely no work calls and no thinking about tomorrow's cases or ruminating on the cases from the day.

Support. Time poverty thrives in isolation, so I invite you to share the load. This might mean finally asking your colleague to cover that committee you dislike or hiring someone to clean your house.

I had a client who realized she was spending six hours a week on grocery shopping and meal prep. She started using a grocery delivery service and gaged back a quarter of a day every week.

Mindset. Challenge the martyrdom narrative. You're not required to sacrifice your entire life for your profession. I know this feels radical, but your worth as a healthcare provider isn't measured by how much of yourself you give up.

Practice what I call time sovereignty, the belief that you have the right to protect some of your time for yourself. When you feel guilty about leaving on time, remind yourself, I am modeling sustainable practice for my colleagues and ensuring I can provide quality care tomorrow.

And finally, movement. This isn't just physical movement, it's moving away from reactive time use towards intentional timeuse. Try the time audit exercise.

For one week, just track where your time actually goes in 15 or 30 minute blocks. And most people will be shocked to discover they're spending two to three hours daily on tasks that could be streamlined or eliminated completely.

And here's a strategy that may well help as well, the time protection protocol. Before saying yes to any new commitment, ask yourself these three questions.

Does this align with my core responsibilities? Can someone else do this? And what will I stop doing to make room for this. Reflecting on what we've talked about today, identify one hour in your typical day that you can reclaim.

Maybe it's that meeting that could be an email or those 15 minutes you spent looking for supplies or something or other because your workspace isn't organized.

Reclaim that hour and use it for something that really feeds your soul. Read a chapter of that book. Call that friend. Sit in your garden. Take a bath.

Remember who you are outside of your stethoscope or scrubs. And here's a reflection question for you. If you had an extra hour every day, what would you do with it?

Don't think about work. Think about you! Think about the person before you were in healthcare. The person you still are underneath all those responsibilities.

I want you to share this insight with one other person this week.

## Reclaiming an Hour and Closing Reflections

And maybe it's a colleague who's also drowning in time poverty, or maybe someone in your personal life who needs to understand why you've been so absent.

Remember, protecting your time isn't selfish. It is essential. You can't pour from an empty cup and you cannot provide sustainable care if you're running on empty.

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Links are in the show notes and until next week, be kind to yourself. You deserve to have an amazing life outside of work. This is Dr. Jo Braid and Ready to take the next step in your burnout recovery journey?

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