

# The Nurse Becoming Podcast #111: Improving Charting & Time ...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

burnout, charting, nurse practitioners, burned, patient, nursing, nurse practitioner, note, job, nps, important, family nurse practitioner, support, focusing, question, perfectionism, feel, home, life, conversations

## SPEAKERS

Amanda Guarniere, Erica Dorn

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**A** Amanda Guarniere  
Hey Erica, welcome to the show.

**E** Erica Dorn 00:04  
Thank you for having me on today.

**A** Amanda Guarniere  
I should really say, "Welcome BACK" to the show because you were on our show previously. Good. We did a special burnout roundtable episode. So I'm excited to have you back on your own so that we can chat more.

**E** Erica Dorn 00:21  
Yes, thank you.

**A** Amanda Guarniere  
So we've already introduced you kind of in my intro, but I'd love to hear in your own words, tell me a little bit about who you are what you do before we get into the topic of the show.

**E** Erica Dorn 00:33

Yeah, so I am a wife, mom of two busy boys, a family nurse practitioner... I currently work in a critical access hospital doing primary care and then covering emergency services. And I am the creator of The Burnout Nurse Practitioner; I help overwhelmed NP's create work-life balance, conquer burnout and advocate for themselves.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

I love it. And I've been following you for a while I think that it's so great that platform that you have created. So I'm excited to dive in a little bit more. And I'd love to start a little bit more with kind of your origin story in nursing. How long have you been a nurse? When did you decide to become an NP? And that kind of journey and path?

**E** Erica Dorn 01:23

Yeah, so I actually declared nursing in high school, I knew I wanted to do something in health care, and just really felt called to nursing, I really wanted to make a difference and make an impact in a patient's life. I learned pretty quick once I started my first RN job on a busy acute care floor that you don't have the time nor the energy to like really, you know, sit down with their patient and hold their hand and, and make that impact. So about three years into my nursing career, I started to feel burned out. I became like mentally, emotionally, physically exhausted, I was not taking care of myself, not showing up for my family how I wanted to, I started to dread going to work and just felt like this detachment from my work and from my family, and even from myself. I didn't even know I was burned out. I actually remember reading an article in the break room about compassion fatigue, and I checked mark like every single box. And so once I kind of became aware that I was completely burned out, I gradually made the changes overcame the burnout, and then ended up going to a family nurse practitioner school. So that's kind of my story.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, and I I relate to that so much. You know, I was going to ask you did you know you were burned out at the time? And you you answered that question. And I had a similar experience where, you know, when I was working as an NP in the ER, with little kids at home, you know, I just started to feel this disconnection from my impact. And I remember thinking, like, I'm literally doing life saving work and it doesn't feel important enough, or it doesn't feel like I'm making a difference. And, you know, in retrospect, you know, those are just, you know, hallmark classic signs of burnout and compassion, fatigue, and it, it really took me having a distance from it, you know, having my third baby and my extended European maternity leave, for me to have the opportunity to reflect and be like, Oh, it wasn't just, you know, it wasn't a bad job, or it wasn't that I wanted to be a stay at home parent or whatever it was, it was the fact that I was burned out. And I didn't even realize it was happening when I was when I was experiencing it. So I can, you know, totally relate to your story.

**E** Erica Dorn 04:11

Yeah, I mean, I think burnout, like, especially in the last two years, but burnout was an issue,

you know, before the pandemic, and now we've just had increased stress and demands of our job. And there's just a lot going on right now. And so I just tried to bring awareness and support to healthcare providers, specifically nurse practitioners who, like you said, you know, might not know that you're burned out, but just kind of becoming aware that something's not right.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, definitely. And I'd love to talk about kind of what you think are some top contributors to burnout and, you know, I think it's important to preface the conversation by making sure that we make it really clear that at least I am I am assuming you feel this way too. But I don't feel that all the responsibility for burned out healthcare providers falls on the individual. Right? I think that there are some systemic and institutional issues at play that we don't have a ton of control over. And so, you know, sometimes I hear burnout conversations that, you know, put all the responsibility on the person who's burned out. And I think that's kind of a slippery slope. But I'd love to get your thoughts on kind of what you think those top contributors to burnout are, so that we can maybe cover some things that we do have control over as we either try to get out of the burned out place or prevent getting there.

E

Erica Dorn 05:44

Yeah, I mean, that's absolutely right. There are many things out of our control that I think need to change, in order to help healthcare providers with burnout. However, I always encourage nurse practitioners, you know, to make the changes that they can control and can start that process themselves. So I would say for nurse practitioners, the number one cause of burnout that I have discovered is work life imbalance. And the number one cause of that imbalance is charting, which we'll talk more about later. But so many nurse practitioners are, you know, staying late at the office, they're bringing their charts home, they're spending more time, you know, even if they're not actually charting at that moment, they're still overwhelmed and stressed with the amount of charting and just the demands that work has. And then a few other contributors to burnout. Nursing in general is a caring profession. And we tend to always put, you know, other's needs in front of our own, and kind of put ourselves on the back burner. Also, like you said, you know, just being a mom and having other people that you have to take care of, and be responsible for having that mom guilt, you know, not showing up the way you want to can be a contributor to to burnout. And then like we talked, I mean, there's those contributors that are out of our control, you know, some of the mental emotional demands of the job, lack of support from administration, you know, maybe lack of support from some of our co workers or colleagues, those can all contribute to burnout.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, for sure. And I guess a question that comes up is, you know, let's say I'm a nurse or an NP, and I know that something feels off, I feel unhappy, what are going to be some steps for me to figure out okay, is this a burnout situation? Is this a bad job situation? Is this a bad profession situation? Like, how do we start to untangle those big questions?

E

Erica Dorn 08:01

Yeah, I mean, like, both you and I said, we didn't even know that we were burned out, you know, until we had some awareness or, you know, kind of some time to reflect a lot of personal reflection, and figuring out what you want in your life, you know, what is a priority? What kind of changes do you think need to be made? That's really kind of the first step. And then just really having open and honest conversations, whether it's, you know, with your colleagues, with some healthcare, friends, you know, just making it known that you're struggling, because most likely, you know, they are too. I have a Facebook group that burned out nurse practitioner that offers, you know, a safe place for nurse practitioners to talk about some of these things. And I've heard so many times, you know, a nurse practitioner will tell their story, and then, you know, there'll be a ton of comments on Yeah, like, I'm experiencing that too. Like, yeah, like, that's exactly the way it is in my job. And so that just kind of helps to have some support in know that you're not alone. Going through this.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, definitely. I think that that validation of our experience is can be very healing, right? It can, it can show us that we're not alone. And also just really help us realize that while our experiences are unique, they're often they're often shared and there's kind of some community in that and in being able to, to push through once you know, okay, this isn't, I'm not the only one going through that.

**E** Erica Dorn 09:42

And I think like nurse practitioners, especially kind of have a disconnect, you know, from the rest of the health care world. Some nurse practitioners might be the only one you know, in their office or you know, not have a lot of close friends. Um, that they can talk with. So I think yeah, coming together and just just talking and having those conversations and having that support and know that you're not alone that can really go a long ways.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. So, you know, something we wanted to talk about in this episode is really digging specifically into the charting and time management aspect. Because as you mentioned, and as I've also witnessed, it's a huge contributor, especially for NPs in terms of their job satisfaction, and you know, their, their path to burn out. So yeah, let's...

**E** Erica Dorn 10:46

Ohp! You muted. I can't hear you right now.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Oops, sorry. What was the last thing before I was muted?

E

Erica Dorn 10:55

Does that going back to the charting and causing burnout.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Okay. All right, let me start. I'll start that question. Again. I'll edit that out. So something that we wanted to focus on in this episode is charting and time management, because you and I have both witnessed that this is a huge contributor to burnout, especially for nurse practitioners. So I'd love to kind of dive into this topic a little bit more for this episode. So tell me first, what have you seen when it comes to charting and time management and how it affects nurse practitioners specifically?

E

Erica Dorn 11:35

Yeah, so charting- it's something that we have to do, there's no other way around it, we have to document you know, our visit for legal reasons, and billing and continuity of care and all of that. So it's something that we can't just, you know, brush off and ignore, I would say the biggest way that charting plays a factor into like burnout would be the time aspect. And that's time away, you know, that work life imbalance time away from your family, time away from yourself, and that self care and, and setting those priorities. So that would be the biggest thing. A lot of nurse practitioners that I talked to are spinning, unpaid time. So you know, they're staying late at the office, or they they're bringing charts home and their salary. So you know, they work their 40 hours, they don't get paid for any other outside time to finish up that charting. And I mean, that can cause a lot of, you know, resentment for your job and for seeing patients. And, you know, there's push from administration to see even more, and it can just be a vicious cycle. And ultimately, I mean, cause the burnout.

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Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, yeah, for sure. I have definitely kind of been in the middle of that. And, you know, I think it shocks a lot of NPs, a lot of new NPs that, first of all, the majority of our roles are salaried roles. And the fact that we're not, you know, badging in and badging out for our shifts, but rather, you know, you're, you're here for your shift, and you're supposed to finish it on time, and you need to get your work done. And you're not paid extra if it takes you extra time to chart. And that's, I think, a huge cultural shift for a lot of NPs, especially who are coming from like very traditional nursing roles where you're an hourly paid employee. So I think like to start, there's kind of this a different expectation, and then a huge learning curve when it comes to managing your time, especially if you're in a practice where you're seeing a lot of a lot of patients per day up, it can be pretty shocking.

E

Erica Dorn 13:54

Yeah. And the other thing to add, I mean, it's not just the charting, it depends on your practice setting, but you know, primary care, there's medication refills, there's, you know, reviewing past medical history, there's following up with patient messages, which can really, you know,

the patient can abuse that connection to the provider. So, there's like tons of other things that you have to get done throughout your day. And it can really cause a lot of stress and overwhelm for getting everything done in a timely manner.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, for sure. So I'd love to really unpack and present some actionable steps, some either tips or hacks or, you know, one to three things that listeners can implement tomorrow or during their next shift to really try to be more efficient and effective with their time. So what would you say is a good place to start?

E

Erica Dorn 14:56

Yeah, so there's so many you know, different ways that we can work on managing our time or our charting. I have an entire course that goes over that. But I just want to highlight a few of the ones that you can kind of take quick action on. So first off, I want to say that becoming aware of how you're currently spending your time. And you can fill out you know, a time log to kind of see how long does it take you to see a typical acute patient or a chronic patient, or you know, a follow up or a new patient, becoming aware of that. And then also, like, we talked about all the other tasks, so how long does it take to respond to those patient messages and get through the medication refill. So really just being aware of how you're currently spending your time, that'll help you to focus on you know, which aspect or avenue you should work on first, the other thing I want to say is that small changes can really add up. So if you find, you know, start using a template or start working on decreasing your charting, the time it takes you to, you know, finish a note, if you can find something that will save you, you know, one minute per patient, and you're seeing 30 patients a day, I mean, that's 30 extra minutes that you can have, at the end of your day, you know, that means getting home in time for supper with your family, or, you know, leaving on time to attend the kids activity. So, just really focusing on like those small habit changes, and ultimately, you know, those can compound and build up over time. I would say one thing I see a lot of nurse practitioners do is over chart. So, you know, if you think about charting as an RN, on a hospital floor, I mean, you were with that patient, you know, for 12 hours, you had to document everything, you know, they ate, how much they voided, you know, what they did, you know, work with physical therapy, you documented every single hour on that patient. And so I think it's kind of a struggle for a lot of new nurse practitioners to then change that into nurse practitioner charting. The provider status, you know, you're focusing on that one problem or you know, patient complaint, and having the note be very problem focused. So, you know, if you do the review of systems, only the pertinent topics, or like for the physical exam, just really focusing on that specific complaint. For example, if a patient comes in for knee pain, I don't even take my stethoscope in the room, you know, I don't worry about listening to breath sounds or heart sounds. And that might feel a little bit hard for some nurse practitioners. But you know, the patient came in for knee pain, unless I see them, you know, struggling to breathe or something, I'm focusing only on, you know, that knee pain and addressing that issue. So I think just having those problem focused notes, and making sure you're not adding in extra information that might not be important, or might not be not important, and just keeping them very short and sweet. And to the point. And Amanda, I think you can probably attest to this just being from the emergency room. I mean, your guys's notes, were very specific and focused on that complaint.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And, you know, I think for me, using templates and dot phrases, and you know, there, especially in emergency where you kind of have these, like, top 10 complaints that you see over and over really honing in on making that as efficient as possible for those problem focused notes like I, over time, you end up having this script of the education that you provide for someone that you're discharging home with, you know, a sprained ankle, or whatever it is. So I know what I'm going to say, I'm going to say it pretty similarly, every time. So why don't I create a dot phrase of exactly what I'm going to say. So then it takes literally two seconds for me to insert that entire thing into into the note and, you know, there are a lot of groans about electronic medical records, but so much of it has been designed to help make our jobs easier if we if we know how powerful those tools are. So I think that it's really you know, important to use them to our advantage and to your point, yeah, saving one minute per patient. I mean, can can really be the difference between you. Yeah, getting home for something versus no. And you know, the for first point that you made about really doing the time log or a time study, I think is so important and shouldn't be, shouldn't be overlooked. Because I don't know about you, but, and this has happened in so many different aspects of my life, including like folding laundry, the, the perception of how much time it takes, and energetically how I feel about it versus how much time it actually takes, at least for my brain is always like, so far, like so much different than I cannot estimate or guess. And if you ask me, I would overestimate every single task that I loathe and underestimate every single task that I love in terms of the time it takes. Do that time study, take just one or two days to do it and I think it'll be really, really illuminating.

E

Erica Dorn 20:49

Oh, yeah. And it can pick up on you know, distractions, if you're someone who's easily distracted or, you know, chatting with your colleagues and, and really, you know, you should be utilizing that time to finish the charts, so you don't have to bring them home. That's a big one. And then also, I would say, like perfectionism, too. A lot of us tend to procrastinate, because, you know, we're worried about having a perfect note or, you know, maybe we don't know for sure the correct treatment plan. So then we, you know, research and look at all these different resources. And really, you know, we, we probably wasted more time than we should have by, you know, having that sense of perfectionism.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, yeah, for sure. I think, you know, we nurses tend to be a people pleasing perfectionist, bunch, not all of us, but many of us. So I think this is a good exercise in getting away from that, like, can you save yourself a minute and not actually correct all your spelling errors? Like, yeah, are you okay with that? Can you close a chart that has a spelling error? That looks enough like the word even though it's not exactly correct, you know? Yeah, that makes you uncomfortable, examine why and, and decide, alright, is it worth it for you to spend, you know, five minutes proofreading every note and then staying after, you know, an hour or two or taking all those charts home? So yeah, I think all these things are good questions to ask ourselves.

E

Erica Dorn 22:22

I will note I am a terrible speller so I do go through spellcheck and make sure I don't have

I will note, I am a terrible speller, so I do go through spellcheck and make sure I don't have anything misspelled. But I mean, yeah, just that sense of, you know, having to reread it and, and take all that extra time that perfectionism can really be a block for us.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, yeah, I definitely agree. So I wanted to ask, you know, at one, at what point does someone who recognizes that they're burned out, like, they're trying all these things, they're, they're improving their charting, they're improving their time management? Let's say like, it's not getting better, at what point do they need to make a drastic change, as opposed to just kind of these small habit changes?

**E** Erica Dorn 23:04

Yeah, I mean, I think it's so important, you know, to start with yourself, and to make some of those changes, kind of the next level would be having those honest conversations, you know, with your clinic manager, your administrator, and, you know, just tell them, hey, I'm struggling, you know, this is what I would need, you know, I need more time with my family, I need admin time, I need, you know, better control of the schedule, so it doesn't get too crazy. Ultimately though, you have to put yourself first, we cannot pour from an empty cup. And so if you're constantly, you know, giving to everyone but yourself, you're gonna run out, you're gonna become burned out, and that looks different, you know, for every person. We kind of talked about earlier, some of those signs and symptoms of burnout. But ultimately, like, you have to decide, is this job worth your physical, mental, emotional health? Is it worth, you know, spending hours away from your family, and, you know, missing out on kids activities, those sorts of things. I will add, I've talked to like several nurse practitioners who have felt burned out, and they chose to take, you know, two weeks off or a month off from work, and luckily, you know, their administrator, let them have that time so that they could breathe, you know, they had some time to reflect on their priorities and, you know, take care of themselves for probably the first time in months. And so, you know, that's another option before you completely leave the job. You know, maybe you just need a little bit of time that you can take care of yourself and relax and, you know, figure out what your next step is.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Yeah, for sure. I think creating that space is so important and is often what we need to reflect and figure out what the next step is. So, you know, chances are you have some time off, take it, go on a vacation or a staycation or just get out of your everyday environment. And I think that can be really, really powerful as we're trying to figure out, you know, what we want out of our career, what we want out of our lives, you know, those big, big questions, they take time for us to figure out those answers for sure.

**E** Erica Dorn 25:30

Yeah. And energy. I mean, you can't, you know, continuously go to work every day, if you know, you know, you're struggling and just need that time and just, you know, to step away from that role for for a time to figure out what you need.

A

Amanda Guarniere

Yes, definitely. So I'd love before we close for you to share a little bit more about your platform about this programs and services that you offer, so that folks can connect with you.

E

Erica Dorn 26:00

So I currently offer a few different courses, one on charting, and then also burnout, which talks you know, specifically about self care and setting those boundaries and, you know, implementing some of those, those things that we can do to overcome burnout. I have a course on impostor syndrome, and then also, contract negotiation for nurse practitioners. So you can find me on Facebook- The Burnout Nurse Practitioner, you can join our Facebook group, titled The Burnout Nurse Practitioner, and just find that community and support. I'm on Instagram @burnedoutnp. And then also my website, you can check out my blog, I have tons of you know, helpful posts on burnout and charting tips and impostor syndrome and all the things and that is at [www.burnedoutnp.com](http://www.burnedoutnp.com).

A

Amanda Guarniere

Awesome, I'm taking notes so that we can put it in our show notes so that everyone can find you, where they where they want to and connect with you. That's wonderful. So I've been asking this new kind of final question of all my guests. And it's whether you have any big dreams or goals that you'd like to share, you know, whether it's personally, professionally, whatever. And the reason why I'm asking this question is because I really believe that when we speak our goals out loud, and to somebody else, it really increases the likelihood that they will come true. So I wonder if you have anything to share for that. No pressure!

E

Erica Dorn 27:45

So I mean, ultimately, as far as the burnout nurse practitioner, I really just want to be that support and, you know, help nurse practitioners to overcome the burnout like I did, because I know, you know, I was there. I know how hard it is, and, and your question, you know, your career and health care and wonder if you should leave. So I really just want to bring that awareness and that support and, you know, create the things for nurse practitioners, I will say I'm going to be getting more into the charting realm, just giving lots more, you know, charting tips, and I think it's something that we barely learn in school. You know, school is very, like, focused on diagnosing and treating, and all of that is super important. But I remember having like maybe 30 minutes on how to do a chart note, like that was the lesson in school, like 30 minutes, and then you get out into the real world. And you're like, What am I supposed to do? Like, how do I form this note? And how do I properly bill in code for it and, and so I really want to just bring a lot more of the charting aspect and support for nurse practitioners. And I will add, I do have a list of smart phrases, kind of a jumpstart list compiled for nurse practitioners. So like we were talking about earlier, you know, using those smarter doc phrases can really save a lot of time. So if nurse practitioners want access to that they just have to put in their email and then can sign up for that.

**A** Amanda Guarniere

Awesome. Well, I'm glad to hear you're going to be doing more about charting. I agree. It's so it's so needed. It's under, under taught, you know, either you don't get a lot of time. Or, like in my case, I remember you know, it would be a whole week long project to write this very, very detailed soap note and present it which is totally unrealistic when you get into the real world and you have to write it in a very, very short period of minutes. It's definitely much needed and I'm so glad that you are here to help fill that void. Thank you. Well, thank you so much for joining us. Erica. I'm so excited for this episode to be shared with everyone. If you're listening you can head to the show notes where you're listening to this episode to connect with Erica find all of her links. Join her Facebook group and thanks again!

**E** Erica Dorn 30:22

Thank you for having me.