

From clear information on clinical trials and open discussion about mental health to new technologies that make conversations easier, we explore how patients, families and health-care professionals are finding new and productive ways to communicate clearly and effectively.

Let's talk.

TALKING TO PATIENTS

PRACTICING COMPASSION

Mindfulness techniques can help doctors communicate more effectively with their patients

by **SEAN P. YOUNG** illustration **PETE RYAN**

ALTHOUGH HE SAYS he is blessed with a positive personality and optimistic nature, Dr. Rob Rutledge, a radiation oncologist and associate professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax, experienced burnout early in his 25-year career.

“It felt like I was falling into depression, but I also remember the team members, the nurses being the ones who inspired me through their kindness,” Rutledge says.

It was this personal challenge, coupled with reading alarming data showing that 50 per cent of working health professionals experience burnout during their careers, that led Rutledge to design a workshop called Taking Care of Us for health-care professionals. He has since delivered this session – which he first developed 15 years ago – around the globe in an effort to help health professionals help both themselves and the patients they care for.

“The science is extremely strong: the higher the level of burnout, the worse the quality of care,” Rutledge says.

Classic signs of occupational burnout include emotional exhaustion, cynicism and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Another sign, one that's particularly dangerous in the world of medicine, is depersonalization, often described as compassion fatigue. ►



