

WELLBEING IN FOUNDATION DOCTORS

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Background

Burnout is a consequence of repeated exposure to stressors and doctors are known to have greater prevalence of depression and burnout than other professional groups.

Depressed doctors make more medical errors and poor wellbeing can lead to impaired judgement and compromise patient care.

A UK study has shown around 1 in 3 doctors to show signs of burnout. Covid-19 has brought the wellbeing crisis amongst doctors to the forefront of public awareness.

AIMS

Our primary aim was to identify whether newly qualified doctors were struggling with their wellbeing. Our findings indicate that foundation doctors do show early signs of burnout even a few months into their jobs.

Our secondary aim is to offer regular wellbeing sessions at East Lancashire Hospital Trust (ELHT), focused on **mindfulness and building resilience**, in order to improve wellbeing.

The sessions afford new doctors a space to voice concerns, practice mindfulness and develop resilience skills to cope with the mental challenges of foundation training.

Methods

A survey was completed by foundation doctors to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the wellbeing of foundation doctors at ELHT.

From the survey a wide range of issues and concerns were raised and the entire cohort of foundation doctors were identified as requiring wellbeing input.

A tailored, pilot wellbeing programme was designed for ELHT foundation doctors, we believe these sessions and wellbeing interventions should be offered at all trusts to support their trainees.

Covid-19, although causing significant alterations to this project, has brought to public attention the necessity of providing these resources. As we could not deliver the wellbeing sessions as planned, we have not yet resurveyed doctors on how useful they find these techniques.

Results

40 foundation doctors participated in a survey which showed that:

- **87.5%** of foundation doctors felt at least moderately **burnt out**,
- **80%** of foundation doctors felt **emotionally hardened**,
- **72.5%** rarely, or never **sleep** for 8 hours each night,
- Only **7.5%** have felt always able to **cope**,
- Only **27.5%** feel at least moderately **supported** by the foundation team,
- Over **60%** would take a break from medicine, or **leave medicine entirely**,
- **90%** have felt the need to **miss a meal** while working,
- **66%** found work stress has affected their **home life**,
- **Less than half of foundation doctors have been able to identify somebody at work to raise stress or wellbeing concerns with.**

Further qualitative data has shown that junior doctors would feel more supported during the current pandemic with: regular debriefing, recognition of individual efforts and advice on coping strategies in lockdown.

Alterations due to Covid-19

As these sessions could no longer be offered due to social distancing, more wellbeing support now being offered by the foundation school, including:

- A 'Wellbeing Café'
- A room in the teaching centre prepared with wellbeing resources
- A share-point account with various wellbeing resources
- Groups set up on Microsoft Teams, to allow foundation doctors to get together and discuss any wellbeing issues/concerns
- Socially distanced face-to-face sessions, provided on an optional basis

Conclusion

These results show that a significant proportion of foundation doctors experience early symptoms of burnout and show signs of poor coping such as lack of sleep and missed meals. We would expect that the implementation of open, wellbeing support sessions in the foundation programme will improve wellbeing. After each session we will again survey foundation doctors, and would recommend that these sessions are permanently featured. Longer term, increased wellbeing might improve retention rates through job satisfaction.

References

Burnout and Doctors: Prevalence, Prevention and Intervention, Kumar S. *Healthcare* 2016, 4(3), 37; <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare4030037>, Published 30/6/2016, Accessed online 01/04/2021