

# Reflecting on Reflective Practice: A Pilot Study of Virtual Reflective Practice (VRP) for Ealing Hospital Foundation Year (FY) Doctors during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Introduction

The GMC's outcomes for graduates states that students should be able to 'manage the personal and emotional challenges of coping with work and workload, uncertainty and change' and 'developing a range of coping strategies such as reflection, debriefing, peer support and asking for help, to recover from challenges and set backs'.<sup>1</sup> The evidence suggests that avoiding reflection of experiences and feelings leads to burnout and low morale.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the pandemic, Ealing Liaison Psychiatry Service (ELPS) was particularly keen to support our hospital FY doctors who have started their career 'thrown in at the deep end' and with limited access to their usual sources of support due to lockdown restrictions.

Since its inception in 2012, ELPS has participated in fortnightly reflective practice sessions and we were keen to offer this valuable resource to our colleagues. In the absence of being able to meet up in real life due to social distancing measures, we decided to set up virtual reflective practice (VRP) sessions in order to meet together whilst having to be apart.

## Aim

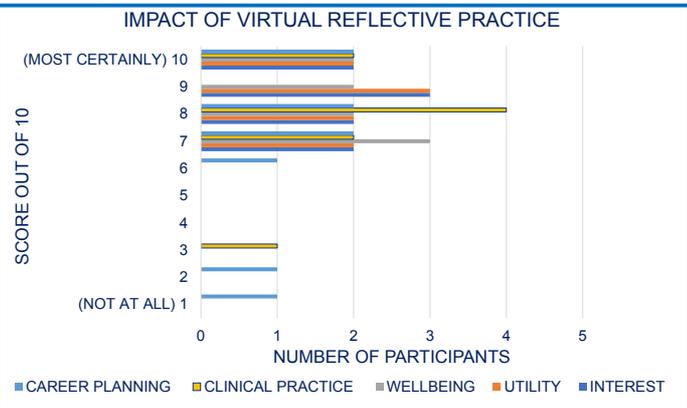
To provide VRP sessions for FY doctors at a district general hospital, with the intention of supporting their clinical practice, professional development and wellbeing.

## Methodology

- o Email invitations for the VRP sessions were sent to all FY doctors in Ealing Hospital by the Postgraduate team
- o Three, one hour long VRP sessions were provided via Microsoft Teams.
- o The sessions were provided in the usual FY doctor teaching slot.
- o The sessions were facilitated by an ELPS Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist.
- o Each session began with an introductory presentation about reflective practice provided by the ELPS FY2 doctor.
- o At the end of each session participants were asked to complete an anonymous feedback questionnaire via Survey Monkey.
- o We kept minutes of the sessions for qualitative analysis in order to identify any emerging themes from the discussion.

## Results

- o On average, 5 participants attended each of the 3 VRP sessions
- o 9 participants completed the Survey Monkey questionnaire



**100% of participants reported that they would want to attend VRP again & that they would recommend VRP to colleagues**

Qualitative analysis revealed emerging themes of:

- o Balancing the desire to provide compassionate care with preserving personal wellbeing
- o Perceived lack of autonomy around working patterns
- o Feeling disconnected from colleagues
- o The desire to advocate for patients' needs in a pressurised system
- o Managing uncertainty in both professional and personal life

*It was an experience that broke me everyday*

*I kept thinking it could be a member of my family in that hospital bed*

*Is being a doctor always going to be this hard?*



*How do you keep looking after people and look after yourself at the same time?*

## Discussion

VRP was universally well received by the FY doctors who participated.

Although we were disappointed by the attendance numbers, we had informal feedback that more FY doctors were keen to attend VRP but were unable to do so because of clinical pressures and the limitations of hospital computers which often did not have a video camera and / or a microphone.

ELPS staff who participated in VRP described that the experience was very beneficial for them in terms of their own professional development and wellbeing.

This project also helped to nurture good working relationships between Liaison Psychiatry and the Acute Trust, with both senior clinical and managerial hospital staff expressing their gratitude for the initiative and support.

## Conclusion

This pilot study has demonstrated that virtual reflective practice for FY doctors is a valued resource which can have a positive impact on clinical practice, wellbeing and career planning.

We now plan to embed VRP as a regular component of the FY doctor learning experience in Ealing Hospital and have also offered VRP to other staff groups.

## References

1. Outcomes for graduates. (2021). Retrieved 1 May 2021, from <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/standards-and-outcomes/outcomes-for-graduates>
2. Elton, C. (2019). Also human. London: Windmill Books.