

## TAKE-HOME NOTES:

**Managing stress and avoiding burnout: Part 1 – Understanding stress and burnout**

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In this module, we have:

- looked at stress from a multi-faceted physiological, psychological and personal perspective
- seen the relationship between pressure, stress and burnout
- looked at some of the issues we as doctors in general and psychiatrists in particular face when it comes to stress in our day to day lives.

**Stress** is ultimately subjective and dependent on the individual's perception of the pressures they are under. In some circumstances, stress can be beneficial and advantageous for growth.

**Burnout** is the exhaustion resulting from chronic stress that leads to a depletion of resources, emotional and mental fatigue. It can be measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

**Stress and the medical profession**

Doctors are reporting escalating levels of stress and low morale. Occupational health statistics reported by consultant psychiatrists suggest that medical practitioners along with the armed forces have the highest incidence of work-related ill-health.

Studies have shown that:

- while doctors have lower rates of many kinds of physical illness than the general population, there are higher rates of suicide, psychiatric illness and possibly alcohol and drug misuse
- up to 7% of doctors will have a substance use problem during their lifetime.

**Stress and psychiatrists**

It has also been suggested that consultant psychiatrists experience higher levels of stress than consultants working in other specialties, despite their lower objective workloads.

This is specifically **stress as a result of organisational constraints** along with **higher emotional exhaustion** because of work and more severe depression.

However, there is much more variance within types of consultant doctors than there was between them. This suggests that within any specialty the doctor (or any other individual for that matter) with higher neuroticism and higher work demands is likely to experience more stress-related outcomes such as burnout and psychological distress.

Job stress levels have been shown to predict the degree of burnout experienced by doctors ('burnout' being defined as the tendency to be emotionally exhausted by one's work and to dehumanise patients). Higher clinical workloads are related to higher levels of stress, while higher clinical workloads are also related to higher feelings of personal achievement.

## Reflection

(2.12) What do you think about the following statements? Does your experience of stress bear them out? 'A specific task or event can be very stressful on one occasion, but not on another. This will all depend on how you are personally feeling and what the other pressures on you are.' 'What you find stressful may not be the same for someone else whose perceptions and ways of coping with pressure are different to yours.'

(2.18) The first step in managing stress and preventing burnout is to take responsibility for your own experience of stress and then make a commitment to change. With that in mind, which (if any) changes in behaviour/feelings/thinking/health do you observe in yourself?

(3.12) What do you think are the expectations put upon you as a psychiatrist by others (patients, other staff, peers), or by yourself?

## Tables and figures

[\(1.5\) Questionnaire](#)

[\(2.11\) Table of psychobiological responses](#)

[\(2.26\) Burnout, depression and work-related stress](#)

## Organisations providing support services for doctors

National Services	Provider	Contact Details	Description of Service
The Psychiatrists' Support Service	Royal College of Psychiatrists	Tel: 020 7245 0412 Email: <a href="mailto:psychiatristssupportservice@rcpsych.ac.uk">psychiatristssupportservice@rcpsych.ac.uk</a> Write to: Psychiatrists' Support Service Manager The Royal College of Psychiatrists 17 Belgrave Square London SW1X 8PG	The Psychiatrists' support Service is a confidential support and advice telephone service for member psychiatrists who, for example, find themselves in difficulty over issues such as bullying and harassment, career pathway, GMC involvement, health issues, inquiries, serious clinical incidents.
BMA Counselling	British Medical Association	Tel: 08459 200 169	Provides 24/7 telephone counselling by qualified counsellors
British Doctors' and Dentists' Group		Tel: 0870 444 5163 Website: <a href="http://www.medicouncil.alcoh.demon.co.uk">www.medicouncil.alcoh.demon.co.uk</a>	Where cultural or linguistic problems may be a contributing factor, doctors can access the health counselling panel.
Doctors for Doctors	British Medical Association	Tel: 020 7383 6739 Website: <a href="http://www.bna.org.uk/doctgorsfordoctors">www.bna.org.uk/doctgorsfordoctors</a>	The unit deals with a wide range of problems, including doctors subject to bullying and harassment, as well as supporting doctors who have been suspended or are going through a complaints procedure. Doctors contacting the unit are from a wide spectrum of specialities and grades, including medical students.
Doctors' Support Line		Tel: 0870 765 0001 Website: <a href="http://www.bma.org.uk/doctorssupportline.org">www.bma.org.uk/doctorssupportline.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:deidre@doctorssupport.org">deidre@doctorssupport.org</a>	A helpline offering peer support to doctors and medical students who want to talk through personal

			problems. All calls are answered by trained volunteer doctors. Completely anonymous and confidential. Open 36 hours a week.
Doctors' Support Network	Independent registered charity	Helpline tel: 0870 765 0001 Admin tel: 0870 321 0642 Website: <a href="http://www.dsn.org.uk">www.dsn.org.uk</a> Email: secretary@dsn.org.uk	Self-help group for doctors with any form of mental health concern. Also seeks to reduce the isolation and stigma associated with mental ill health. Provides an email support forum, local support meetings and newsletter and runs the Doctors' SupportLine, a confidential and anonymous peer support telephone line.
Sick Doctors Trust		Tel: 0870 444 5163 Website: <a href="http://www.sick-doctors-trust.co.uk">www.sick-doctors-trust.co.uk</a>	A 24-hour helpline manned entirely by doctors. Independent charity, established 11 years ago. Completely confidential service providing advice, support and advocacy to doctors who believe they may have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs. Calls are welcomed from families, colleagues, employing organisations and others.
Support4Doctors	Royal Medical Benevolent Fund	Tel: 020 8540 9194 Website: <a href="http://www.support4doctors.org">www.support4doctors.org</a> ; <a href="http://www.rmbf.org">www.rmbf.org</a> Email: <a href="mailto:enquiries@rmbf.org">enquiries@rmbf.org</a>	Charity which can provide financial help for sick doctors who are unable to work. Also signposts a range of other organisations that can help.
Surgeon-to-Surgeon Helpline	Royal College of Surgeons of England	Tel: 0800 107 1916	Provides personal and professional advice and signposting
Clinical Performance Support Unit	East Midlands Healthcare Workforce Deanery	Tel: 0115 846 7641 Website: <a href="http://www.eastmidlandsdeanery.nhs.uk">www.eastmidlandsdeanery.nhs.uk</a>	Provides a service for doctors and dentists who find themselves in difficulty, offering career guidance and one-to-one support
House Concern	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust	Tel: 0191 230 0043 Fax: 0191 227 5142 Email: greta.nushet:ntw.nhs.uk; Margaret.rangecroft:ntw.nhs.uk; pat.black:ntw.nhs.uk	A service specially for doctors and other health professionals working in the Northern Deanery. It provides a clinical service to all doctors and an educational service to all healthcare professionals.
Medic Support	Oxford	Tel: 01865 223 924 or 01865 556 648 Website: <a href="http://www.oxforddeanerycdu.org.uk/health.help_for_trainees/medic_support.html">www.oxforddeanerycdu.org.uk/health.help_for_trainees/medic_support.html</a> Email: <a href="mailto:June.Dent@obmh.nhs.uk">June.Dent@obmh.nhs.uk</a> Or <a href="mailto:Philip.Roys@obmh.nhs.uk">Philip.Roys@obmh.nhs.uk</a>	A confidential service offering a rapid response and a choice of therapeutic treatments for personal and work-related difficulties
MedNet	London and KSS Deanery	Tel: 020 8938 2411	Provides doctors and dentists with practical advice about their career, emotional and clinical support should they need it, and, if appropriate, access to brief or longer-term psychotherapy. It operates

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