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Fostering resilience with GPs: a workshop approach

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Introduction

In recent years, change within the NHS and to the way care is delivered has seen the intensity and complexity of the workload of GPs increase and broaden beyond the face-to-face clinical encounter. The cumulative effect of such 'shifting sands' can be significant for the individual and lead to "periods in which workload, adverse events, emotional demands and the lack of supportive relationships (to name but a few factors) may act as stressors that can undermine professional practice" (Howe *et al*, 2012, p. 350).^[1] Fostering resilience in the workforce is an area of interest across a range of professions, and currently forms an important area of development for medical educators, particularly with trainees.

There would seem to be a clear need for there to be space and time within continuing professional development for clinicians to pause and focus on their professional context and themselves, as well as to address learning needs or focusing on clinical outcomes. The formative element of appraisal goes some way to bring these aspects of professional development to the fore, however there is also a need for ways and means to act upon and address them. A recent paper^[2] in the *British Journal of General Practice* by Cleland and colleagues called for educators and learners to 'think differently' and move away from the "competency tick box" and towards "medical education" ... "redesigned explicitly to support and reward the development of both professional identity and the life-long and self-regulated learning skills required to underpin life-time professional practice" (Cleland *et al*, 2014, p. 422). We were particularly struck by the seeming absence of 'well-being' as key part of professional practice, and a lack of acknowledgment of the centrality of the self in well-being. An awareness of these issues prompted the GP programme directors to plan an educational session for GPs in practice which sought to place the individual doctor at the centre of educational activity.^[3]

Description of the programme

A workshop was planned which had two principal aims: first was to help participants develop a better awareness of themselves in relation to the stressors they may encounter in the general practice workplace and to help them to identify ways to manage these stressors; and second to undertake a creative activity to contrast their usual daily or educational

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experiences. The second aim was given equal weight after one of the facilitators [JC] ran a well-received arts-based CPD event in 2009. Feedback from this earlier session indicated that the participants reported valuing the opportunity to spend time with colleagues in the profession on a creative activity. An overview of the two-day workshop programme and a summary of the sessions are given in box 1.

[Insert box 1 here]

Participants

Twenty-five participants attended the workshop, of which three reported that they were full time, 20 part-time, and one each not working and not stating. Participants worked a full spectrum of sessions from none to 9, with an average of 5. Of the group: 14 were partners, 6 were locums, 3 were associates or salaried, 1 was unemployed and 1 did not give an answer. In addition to a GP clinical role, fifteen held wider roles (being appraisers, GPwSIs or educators) and of this fifteen, two held two additional roles, i.e. were appraisers and educators alongside being a GP. The group comprised both newly qualified /early career GPs and those in the mid-career / the 'twilight' years.

Feedback on the programme

The workshop was evaluated at the end of each day, when participants completed paper forms comprising a mix of open, free-text and closed Likert scale questions (scored 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive). The sessions were evaluated in terms of: style/delivery, the speaker's knowledge, the relevance to need, the usefulness, opportunity to discuss/reflect, responsiveness of the speaker to the audience and an overall rating. Participants were contacted again two months later to identify any further outcomes or reflections using an electronic survey. In particular we wanted to identify whether: participants had used the material covered in any of the sessions since the workshop; there had been any impact, i.e. change, on work or home life, and there was interest in attending such a workshop again and if so, suggestions for topics or content. As well as participant feedback, non-participant observation was undertaken by a researcher [SS] to record the process of the sessions in field note form (after Lofland and Lofland)^[4] and the facilitators [JC and DP] gave their reflections on the day. These additional strands of data were intended to help the

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facilitators evaluate the format of the workshop and plan future events in terms of content and process.

Motivation for attending

As part of the feedback participants were asked what had motivated them to attend the workshop and their expectations of it. Twenty four responded, giving answers that fell generally into one or other of two broad theme groups: The first, reported by 16, was that they were looking to develop insight, skills /knowledge to support themselves and others (i.e. patients, appraisees, trainees) in response to their current situation, examples given were being in the face of feelings of a loss of control, overwhelming workload, practice stress or conflict, work/life imbalance. The second, given by 8, was that resilience was a general area of interest to them and they wanted to learn more. Participants were asked about their main current stressors; responses most frequently referred to the general changing nature of GP work [n.21] (increasing complexity; lack of time; patient expectations; case overload; non-clinical work burden), the effects of juggling multiple responsibilities [n.4] and intensity of work impacting on home life [n.5]; and a small number of responses referred to more specific partnership or staff issues [n.6], work/life events in recent times [n.2] or particular feelings (of fatigue, becoming out of date, loss of confidence, not being valued/supported) [n.5]. Five of the 24 participants had received training in this area previously.

Feedback on the sessions

'On the day' feedback rated each of the sessions highly. The overall ratings are given here: 'GP Wellbeing' [avg. 4.5, range 3-5]; 'Stress Management and Life Skills for GPs' [avg. 4.8, range 4-5]; 'Art' [avg. 4.9, range 3-5]; 'Puppetry' [avg. 4.7, range 4-5] and 'Mindfulness for GPs' [avg. 4.2, range 2-5]. A selection of comments is given in box 2.

[Insert box 2 here]

All 24 participants reported that the session had met or exceeded their expectations. In addition they were asked 'what learning will you take away?' and if any changes in home or work life were planned. Twenty one participants reported one or more 'take aways,' the most popular concerning mindfulness [n.19]. Twenty one participants reported considering

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making changes: to use mindfulness practices [n.15], unspecified [n.7], concerning taking up a creative activity [n.3] and unsure [n.1]. The images below show the participants in the creative sessions.

[Insert images 1 and 2 here]

Online feedback was gathered two months after the workshop to identify the longer-term impact. Thirteen of the original participants responded [52%], and were asked if they had subsequently made use of any of the information or practices covered in the workshop. Twelve of the thirteen responded that they had, and identified those linked to mindfulness. Just three respondents reported having developed or acted on their learning, including taking up painting and downloading/using a mindfulness app. Eight respondents reported having made changes at home and eight at work, including consciously making time for breaks, meditation or leisure activities, self-management of their outlook /perspective around others, and for one, to retire. Ten respondents reported that they would attend a similar event again in the future.

New developments for the programme

The workshop has run again in the autumn of 2014. Based upon the feedback received, the facilitators have developed the programme by extending the theoretical context provided by the speakers into areas such as NLP, and future iterations may explore other creative activities such as poetry writing, singing or drumming.

Conclusion

The changing nature of general practice and increase in self-reported work-related stress among GPs calls for a renewed focus on practitioner well-being and resilience as part of organized continuing professional development. Our workshop has highlighted the desire for such professional development amongst GPs, regardless of their current working arrangements. The workshop was well-received, and feedback has demonstrated both immediate and medium-term impact on the individual, both at work and home. The use of humanities and creative sessions helped to engage the GPs on multiple levels and complemented the more structured sessions. In particular the popularity of the mindfulness session has led us to provide an eight week 'Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction' (MBSR)

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Course for GPs in late 2014, allowing a greater focus on this aspect of resilience training.

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Ethical approval

Formal ethical approval was not sought as the evaluation concerned education/training provision within the remit of the GP School.

Conflicts of interest

None declared.

Insertions to the text

Box 1: The workshop programme and overview of the sessions

| Day 1 | Session | |
|-------|--|--|
| | GP Wellbeing [50 mins] | This session presented by Gareth Bryant, gave the LMC perspective on stress drawing on recent research and gave an overview of the resources available locally to support GPs and practices. |
| | Stress Management and Life Skills for GPs [1.5hrs, 1hr, 1hr] | This session, facilitated by John Perry, looked at different theories of stress and managing stress, and considered how individual differences such as personality impacts on this. The group undertook some guided exercises to aid reflection on the session content and tested out some strategies for dealing with stressful situations. |
| Day 2 | Session | |
| | Art or Puppetry [1hr, 1.5hrs] | <u>Art</u> The art session was facilitated by a local artist, Felicity House. It began with the group undertaking several short speed drawing exercises where they drew a range of items using pastels. The group then observed the artist demonstrate the use of pastels to draw a fruit or vegetable, before doing so themselves, and finally each selected several items to create a |

| | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| | | <p>small still life which they then drew. The session closed with the group viewing each other's work.</p> <p><u>Puppetry</u></p> <p>The puppetry session was facilitated by Claire Harvey and Edward Wren of The River People. It began with the group meeting some of the puppets from previous shows before the participants made their own puppets using newspaper. Participants were then coached on the basic elements of puppetry. The group then practiced these skills and brought their puppets to life through movement and interaction. The session closed with the group reflecting on how stories and plays might link to clinical practice and help patients in coming to terms with grief, depression and sexual abuse.</p> |
| | Mindfulness for GPs [1hr, 1hr] | <p>An experiential introduction to mindfulness and how to integrate it into daily life facilitated by Ali Lambie and Rob Collett.</p> |

Box 2: A selection of 'on the day' feedback comments

On mindfulness: "A great introduction to mindfulness and future resources used. I will definitely use!" "I have a much better understanding of mindfulness - already thinking of ways to use it for myself and my patients." "Lots of useful tips on how to use mindfulness ourselves or how to help our patients access courses/ books/ CDs. I loved the practical exercises. Have never done anything like this before and will make an effort to do more."

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On art: "Relaxing, time out, slowing down and absorbing." "Great enjoyment and a sense of achievement." "After 18 years of not doing any art and missing it, this has kick started my motivation to draw. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

On puppetry: "I am not generally a creative person and was really surprised how I was able to access and immerse myself in a creative activity and lose myself in it. A new way of finding a peaceful place for myself to 'stop the world' for a short while." "Enjoyed immensely and was emphatic, it embraced many elements of people-centered communication." "Great fun. Insight into child within and the imagination."

On stress management and life skills: "Superb speaker - will be life-changing." "Excellent. Learnt ways of looking at things differently to reduce their negative impact on me."

On GP well-being: "Absolutely first class. Excellent speakers. A completely new direction as opposed to conventional CPD"

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Images

The images below show the outcomes of the creative sessions.



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