



# Doctors' Support Network

## Chair's Report AGM 2016

DSN started in January 1996 as a small, informal self-help group for doctors with mental health concerns. DSN was registered as a charity in 2004 and has continued to grow since then.

DSN has had three main functions:

1. Peer support via the email forum and support groups.
2. DSN aims to raise awareness of mental health problems amongst doctors and reduce the stigma attached.
3. DSN aims to help improving the working conditions of doctors to support them in looking after their mental health, improve the support and services available for doctors and encourages doctors to look after their mental health and ask for help as early as possible.

### **Following the last AGM there have been some changes to the committee**

Mahomed, Roberta and Jenny have joined the committee and I would like to warmly welcome them.

Ajay has decided to leave the committee and I would like to thank him very much for all his hard work on behalf of DSN and we would like to wish him all the very best for the future.

I would like to thank the committee members for their enthusiasm, hard work and on-going input over many years; it would not be possible for DSN to exist without them.

### **Finance**

See treasurer report. Overall the financial situation has improved compared to last year. Our main income remains by donations.

Dr Edward Gomm and Laurie are doing the Ironman Mallorca challenge in support of DSN. Please do sponsor them on the Virgin Money Giving Website via this [link](#) on the DSN website.



# Doctors' Support Network

## **We have been busy improving our appearance and publicity material.**

Louise Freeman, our vice chair, has done a sterling job in overhauling our appearance. She has not only designed our new DSN logo but also developed our new website, Twitter account and Facebook page. Huge thanks to Louise for that.

The website went live in May 2016 and contains up-dated material for publicity. It is easy and logical to navigate and contains relevant and interesting information. It provides access to the confidential support forum.

In addition, DSN has now a new Twitter account @DocSupportNet. This has proven to be really popular and we have at present 266 followers. It is not necessary to have your own Twitter account to look at the page.

DSN has a well-established open Facebook group. Anyone can ask to join this group. It is important to remember that DSN is not able to check group member's credentials and therefore nothing should be posted to the group that you would not be happy to see publically available on Facebook. In addition to the Facebook group, DSN has now a Facebook page as well.

Our newsletter has been formatted and is available on our website. We are always looking for contributions so please do get in touch via our email address [info@dsn.org.uk](mailto:info@dsn.org.uk) if you have any ideas.

## **Links**

DSN is pleased to announce that we have formed a link with the newly established Louise Tebboth Foundation. This is a foundation in memory of Louise Marson (nee Tebboth), a Bermondsey GP who took her life in January 2105.

The foundation aims to provide financial assistance to projects and services which support the mental well-being of doctors in England and Wales and initiatives assisting the bereaved families of doctors who have died by suicide.

[www.dsn.org.uk](http://www.dsn.org.uk)



# Doctors' Support Network

Louise's husband, Gary has written a book on his experiences. DSN will receive a small commission at no extra cost to you if you purchase using the link provided on our website.

## **Support**

### **DSN support and debating fora**

Full members of DSN are able to join the online support forum. The support forum is fully anonymised, confidential and therefore a safe place to discuss the experience of being a doctor with a mental health problem. DSN also has an online debating forum. The forum remains active and well used by members. Full members will be sent the link to join the forum.

### **Support Groups**

Full DSN members are invited to attend local support groups where available. The DSN groups provide peer support and are mutually supportive. The instigator of the meet up is not in a 'caring' role and the person organising the group is not perceived as a facilitator. We have currently groups in York, North East England and Scotland. For details please have a look on the website. We are very happy to support members who would like to start their own group with advice so please do get in touch if you are interested.

## **Consultations & Events attended**

### **1) Mental Health Day Newcastle upon Tyne 6th February 2016**

This was a service user run event. Over 60 groups worked together and created an outdoor event. DSN shared a stand and members talked to interested passer-by. Louise was even quoted in the Chronicle talking about the fact that doctors do suffer from mental health problems.



## Doctors' Support Network

**2) GMC - Putting mental health safety at the heart of the fitness to practise process; workshop 7th April 2016**

DSN was invited to take part in a workshop on the current review of the GMC's Fitness to Practise process and its effect on doctors' health. Representatives from a variety of medical organisations attended. Louise Freeman represented DSN. The discussion on her table centred around the importance of effective local management of health / performance issues prior to escalation to GMC referral.

**3) Cardiff University - The development of a tool to support earlier disclosure among doctors and medical students 4th May 2016**

DSN took part in a Cardiff University meeting to discuss the further development of an online tool to help doctors to decide how / when to seek help for their mental health.

**4) Participation in a study run by Swansea University: Supporting the mental health of doctors in Training: What is needed?**

Members of the committee took part in qualitative interviews.

**5) UK Association for Physician Health 10th May 2016**

DSN attended the annual meeting of the UK Association for Physician Health meeting at BMA House.

**6) BMA Listening and Learning 11th May 2016**

DSN took part in the ongoing BMA 'Listening and Learning' exercise where the organisation is looking at how to increase equality and inclusion in medicine.

**7) International Congress of Royal College of Psychiatrists June 2016**

DSN had a stand at the International Congress of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London. The attitude towards DSN was positive and the stand was well visited.



## Doctors' Support Network

### 8) Annual Meeting of the South West Association of National Health Occupational Physicians July 2016

DSN gave a talk on the experience of being a doctor with mental health problems.

### Planned Events

- **BMJ Careers Fair 2016**
- **[WPA World Congress of Psychiatry 2017.](#)**

DSN has been approached by a working group of doctors suffering from bipolar affective disorder under the umbrella of the German Society of Bipolar Disorder. The group offers email and phone support to colleagues suffering from bipolar disorder. The aim of the group is to reduce stigmatisation by writing texts for the society's homepage and newsletter, give speeches on the annual meetings or planning to contribute to the WPA World Congress 2017. DSN has been asked to contribute to a session on doctors' health at the World Congress. We are currently looking into the financial aspects of this.

- **DSN project**

**&me - anti stigma project with [RCVS](#) - planned Houses of Parliament launch early in 2017**

This one of the most exciting projects of DSN and credit goes to Louise who had the initial idea and developed the project further. The aim of the project is to particularly promote openness among senior members of healthcare-related professions about their own mental health in order to encourage all affected healthcare professionals to feel able to seek help at an earlier stage than is currently the case. There has been some improvement in the awareness of junior members of healthcare professions regarding their own mental health in recent years but there is a lack of senior role models. This might lead to the



## Doctors' Support Network

assumption that it is not possible to be successful if one has a mental health problem. It can also confirm the belief that it is better to keep a mental health problem quiet. This has direct relevance to public health in that if doctors were better able to deal with their own mental health, there would be an improvement in the care offered to everyone so it's not purely about looking after highly paid professionals.

DSN aims to have a launch event at which senior healthcare professionals saying a few words and starting the campaign. DSN and the RCVS have excellent contacts across medicine and veterinary medicine so a good mix of influential guests is possible.

We hope to have an afternoon tea event at the Houses of Parliament as venue for the anti-stigma campaign launch. We are currently considering a date in early February 2017 around the annual Time to Talk Day.

### **Other News:**

#### **New DocHealth service was launched in June 2016.**

This is a psychotherapy service for doctors supported by the BMA and the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund which has opened in London. More details about this service are on our website. The service is on a not-for-profit basis with fees depending on the grade and circumstances of the doctor. The experienced clinicians are ex MedNet (a London psychotherapy service for doctors). Self-referring doctors can access up to six face to face sessions. If necessary, further care can be advised.

#### **New GP mental health and occupational health service**

During the UK Association for Physician Health in May 2016 the announcement of a service for GPs with mental health problems was made. The service will be commissioned by NHS England. It is planned to be a service for GPs with mental health problems including a new occupational health service. Although the new service will only be for GPs in England at the moment, this



# Doctors' Support Network

looks like progress and it does prove that there is an understanding out there of the need to support doctors with mental health problems.

## **Future of DSN:**

DSN celebrates its 20th birthday this year! I would like to take this opportunity to look back and reflect on how things have moved on since then. When Lizzy Miller, who founded DSN approached the Royal Colleges and the GMC she was told 'good luck, you will need it'. Now DSN has done joint work with Royal Colleges and the GMC and, although there is still some way to go, a lot has improved for doctors with mental health problems. I would like to thank the founders of DSN for their courage and determination because they created the platform for us to continue what they started. I would like to thank all of the committee members over the last 20 years for keeping DSN going particularly as we all have our own health problems. I would like to thank the current committee in particular for sticking with DSN in a difficult financial year, after we had to close DSL in 2015 and several longstanding members left. Thank you very much for your enthusiasm, determination and hard work which has ensured that DSN has continued to thrive. Without doubt, DSN will continue to provide unique insight into the different aspects of being a doctor with mental health problems as we are the 'voice of the user'. DSN can raise awareness in a way other charity groups or external bodies can't as we have the direct experience of being a doctor with a mental health problem. We are therefore in the best place to provide input into policies, regulatory processes and also to raise awareness in general.

Therefore, DSN's general main aims for next years' activities will be:

- DSN will continue to provide support for doctors in the best possible way. This will be via support groups, website, Twitter and Facebook.
- We will continue to campaign to raise awareness, emphasise openness and reduce stigma whenever approached or we see a possibility to get involved. This will include attendance at relevant conferences and network wherever possible.





## Doctors' Support Network

- DSN has the chance to exchange experiences abroad (WPA Congress provided this is financially possible) and maybe learn some further lessons on how to support doctors with mental health problems. We are very much looking forward to this opportunity.

As the stigma survey conducted by DSN has shown (and also sometimes our own experience) – there remains a lot of stigma and other difficulties related to suffering from a mental illness as a doctor. Doctors are members of the general population and therefore join the queue of 1:4 having a mental illness. Taking into account the increased stress within the NHS and life in general, our risk to develop mental health problems is even higher and it is therefore even more important to continue to raise awareness of this issue and reduce stigma.

DSN is therefore thrilled that the anti-stigma campaign has been welcomed with great enthusiasm and support from individuals and external organisations. We will push forward with it together with the RCVS and we will keep our members up-dated via the website and newsletter. Please do let us know if you have ideas to join in.

The coming year will be financially challenging without any doubt. Our income remains mainly from donations and we aim to be fully transparent with how the money donated is being used.

DSN will continue to involve members as much as possible in decision making about our activities and how the money is being spent. We therefore might survey members and we would be really grateful for members to take part. We will make sure that we don't survey too often and that surveys are brief.

Dr Angelika Luehrs

Chair DSN

10th September 2016