

The Doctors' Support

"helping inform, empower and support our membership"

Autumn 2014

Issue 124

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Dr Phil Hammond
Is a patron of
DSN!



Could you write for us? Contact:
editor@dsn.org.uk

A note about our articles: Any opinions expressed by authors in this newsletter are theirs alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of DSN.



DSN AGM & Conference 2014

All DSN members and associates are invited to our forthcoming AGM & conference in Shoreditch, London. I'm personally looking forward to hearing our speakers and to have the opportunity to help with a craft activity during the breaks.

I know that many members are interested in attending DSN meetings, but that they are understandably anxious about meeting others. I have now met several people who've initially expressed doubts, but thoroughly enjoyed coming along to a DSN conference or meeting. The event will be a safe environment with no pressure to take part in any activity or to ask/answer questions, unless you want to.

So, do come along and meet us on Saturday 11th October in London.

More from the Grey Tortoise

Phil Button's column continues his reflections on suffering from depression.

Holistic Support Website

Dr Lynette Bowden tells us about her

Editorial

by Dr Louise Freeman (Senior Editor)

own charity and their recent venture with free online support material for users.

Recovery Gardening

Helen Plowman's popular gardening column returns with Helen reflecting on the similarities between gardening and taking care of ourselves.

ICPH September 2014

And, if you visit the news section on our website, www.dsn.org.uk, you can learn about our recent experiences at the International Conference for Physician Health, which was recently held at BMA House in London. The DSN stigma survey poster was on display at the conference, and details of this can also be found on the website.

Louise

DSN Committee

Would you like to join the DSN committee?

No special skills needed, just enthusiasm!

Email info@dsn.org.uk by 4th October 2014 with your interest.

Doctors' Support Network AGM & Conference

Saturday 11th October 2014 Human Rights Action Centre, LONDON

Programme

09.30 Registration & Coffee

10.00
AGM & Election of Committee

11.00 Break for Refreshments

11.30
The GMC - Who Watches the Watchers?



[Dr Clare Gerada](#) is the medical director of the Practitioner Health Programme and immediate past chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

12.30
Occupational Health: how we can help

Dr Janet Ballard,
Consultant Occupational Health Physician,
West London Mental Health Trust

13.15 Break for Lunch

N.B. delegates to provide own lunch from home or purchase food locally

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14.30

Experiencing and Exploring
Mindfulness



[Dr Elwyn Perry](#) is a trained counsellor and occupational health doctor. She currently practises as a mindfulness practitioner with The Healthy Company.

15.00

Cracking up, Cracking on



[Bobby Baker](#) is an artist (and a woman!) with a lifetime's experience of making art with and for people with lived experience of mental distress.

15.45

Break for Refreshments

16.15

Clowning and Self-Compassion



[Dr David Wheeler](#) is a GP and programme director for GP training in Greenwich. He has a special interest in communication and also acts as a clown therapy facilitator.

17.00 Close of Meeting

Doctors' Support Network AGM & Conference

Saturday 11th October 2014 Human Rights Action Centre, LONDON

Optional craft activity:

During the refreshment and lunch breaks, an optional craft activity will be facilitated by [Bev Newman](#).

Booking:

You must be a DSN member or associate to attend this FREE event. If you wish to attend, email us at info@dsn.org.uk

Venue Information:

Conference Room
[Human Rights Action Centre](#)
25 New Inn Yard
EC2A 3EA

The venue is over several levels with access via a lift.

Travel:

The Human Rights Action Centre has excellent public transport links – see their website as above.

There is limited parking for people with disabilities, please contact HRAC directly to arrange this.

Phone: 020 7033 1500

Email: HRACevents@amnesty.org.uk

No London congestion charge is payable on Saturdays. [Local parking](#) is available.

Financial assistance with travel expenses:

The Doctors' Support Network has limited funds, but we would not wish to prevent members from attending due to financial constraints. If you are in need of assistance with travel costs, please indicate this as you may be entitled to claim reasonable expenses back.

Joining DSN:

The Doctors' Support Network is free to join but asks for a voluntary donation on joining; suggested donations are £5 for the unemployed and students, or £25 for the employed. DSN is a registered charity no. 1103741 and your donations are eligible for Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer.

Evening Social:

Everyone is welcome to join the committee for a meal at a local restaurant after the conference. Please indicate when booking, if you would like to join us for the meal so that we can make a reservation.

DSN committee minutes 5th July 2014 by Skype

Financial update

No major concerns from new guidance by the Charities Commission.

Wesleyan is providing £100 sponsorship for the DSN 2014 AGM in October.

Doctors' Support Line

Information is required on costs and on how much expenditure is likely to be required for training.

Advertisement for a dedicated DSL co-ordinator placed in variety of media.

Three key areas of responsibility were identified: (i) rota secretary; (ii) receiver of completed call sheets; and (iii) support calls.

Action:

- (1) CM to e-mail volunteers (**Addendum** 13.07.14: a volunteer has been identified for receiver of call sheets but thus far not for the other two responsibilities)
- (2) To obtain up-to-date cost information for DSL

Local group update

North East group—last meeting well attended.

York group typically 6–8 per meeting.

North West group formation suggested.

Support forum

No issues

Newsletter

Various topics suggested for newsletter.

Website

Summarised committee minutes to go on the website.

Any Newsfeed suggestions to go to LF

Publicity & networking

GMC to contribute an article on revalidation and ill health for a future newsletter.

The DSN stigma survey is to be considered for a feature article in BMJ Careers.

Conference Update

ICPH DSN stand & BMA Careers event – need to finalise staffing.

Membership Update

AL to write a message for the next newsletter about why DSN needs donations.

Action:

A summary of DSN's accounts is to go out with the newsletter in September along with the Treasurer's and Chair's reports.

AGM/Annual Conference

Programme for AGM & conference discussed.

Next committee meeting:

**Saturday September 27th 2014 13.30
via Skype**

UK Association for Physician Health June 2014

By Louise Freeman

I recently attended a meeting of the UK Association for Physician Health, an organisation of medical professionals involved in treating sick doctors.

Novel ways of supporting unwell doctors

The programme opened with a presentation from Dr Clare Gerada (medical director of the [Practitioner Health Programme](#)) and [Debbie Cohen](#) (occupational physician) on the subject of ‘Supporting doctors away from the workplace’. Clare referred to barriers to getting doctors back to work, such as general practitioners being required to sit an MCQ and viva before being allowed to practise. She suggested that this made it much more difficult for older doctors to return to work in this speciality. Debbie listed a variety of obstacles to doctors seeking help with mental ill health including lack of knowledge from employing organisations. Then, Dr Sally Coomber (consultant occupational physician with Public Health England) introduced her suggested pathway for managing unwell healthcare professionals. There was much discussion during a group work session on this topic.

Effect of complaints on doctors

The most controversial session of the day was ‘The effect of complaints on doctors’ presented by Anna Rowland (assistant director of policy at the GMC) and Dr Michael Peters (medical director of BMA Doctors for Doctors). During this session, a recent survey by the GMC of suicides among doctors who had undergone the fitness to practice process was

referred to, as was a survey by the BMA on the impact of complaints on doctors – both surveys are unpublished. The conclusions from both pieces of work implied that the process through which fitness to practice complaints were handled could be improved to avoid unintended negative consequences for the individual involved. But, the most animated discussion was around whether individual doctors undergoing fitness to practice had underlying factors which had predisposed them to suffering from related ill health.

Blaming the individual

Having reflected, I personally feel that blaming the individual is common to many stigmatising conditions. When an individual is affected, it is common to look for predisposing factors, even where the underlying incidence of the condition is known to be high in a population. For example, doctors are known to be at higher risk of stress, and this effectively blames the individual for their illness.

Finally, Abigail Moore (BMA industrial relations officer) discussed how to support doctors experiencing bullying and harassment. The day concluded with a group work session where all present contributed to how to take UKAPH forwards, with developments such as a website on which good practice from one area could be publicised to help other regions, thereby reducing the ‘silo working’ referred to by Clare Gerada.

Describing the Grey Tortoise to a Springer Spaniel Part 2

By Dr Phil Button

Phil continues with his reflections on the experience of depression. Do you have an opinion? If so, get in touch with the newsletter team.

Concentration or not ...

This rather conveniently leads me to remember one of the classic diagnostic criteria used by doctors. We are asked if we have a loss of concentration; but, that is the observed effect. I would suggest that what I experience is a diversion of concentration into an internal place. It is as if the full cognitive function of the mighty organ in my head are diverted into resolving the turmoil or malfunction. In doing so, the outside world has to go on hold.

This could be regarded as an exaggerated normal trait of the male sex—the tendency to internalise problems—whereas the female sex is widely described as preferring to talk things out in search of an answer. So, the man shuts down, goes quiet and turns his exhaust on himself while the woman wails vociferously and makes a dramatic overdose in an attempt to communicate their distress. Sorry for the simplistic and sexist characterisation, but I had a flight of idea!

There is a clear limitation here: I can only give my account as a man. My feeling is that it is possible that the apparent lack of concentration ability is only an external observation, secondary to the preponderance of compulsive, obligatory, irresistible and unstoppable thinking, which diverts finite mental capacity to the detriment of external functioning.



Thinking is disorganised

Presently, I believe the primary dysfunction of this disorder is of thinking. Thought becomes pervasive and continuous, yet disorganised. This may be the root issue: that because thought itself is dysfunctional, the ability to explain one's predicament, to look for answers, is impaired.

This inability to provide an answer invokes an internal struggle to resolve a problem for which one temporarily has no answer. It is exhausting and frustrating. Once again male and female differences could lead to separate manifestations, as we are told that the male strives to solve problems internally for the good of his mate. A deficiency in this innate function could easily emasculate a man and cause feelings of inadequacy.

Difference between misery and sadness

For me, the hyper-cognition is, on occasion, stimulating. The circular un-resolving thought process, however, is one that I could easily describe as a state of misery. Perhaps this dichotomy goes some way to elucidating the term bipolarity. There lies a key difference between sadness and depression in my view. The 'misery' of depressive illness is a result of the disordered internal thoughts, whereas sadness is an emotional reaction to an external event.

Holistic Support Website with NEW Self-help Resources

By Dr Lynette Bowden

Fifteen years ago, together with a friend, I started a charity to share some of the things that had helped me in my journey with physical illness and depression.

Our original project was a residential centre. We were able to show that our holistic model was

helpful through Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile evaluation. The centre started when NHS funding was easier to come by and Cornish mental health services funded the stays of people they sent to us. Sadly, the residential centre was too expensive to run long term and our charity has subsequently been working to find new ways to help people in difficulty.

DSN members may have previously read articles about the charity in the newsletter. We have had a couple of name changes; last time my piece was about the 'Transforming Depression' CDs, and the charity was then called Penwethers Holistic Healing.

New possibilities and ways forward

Our latest venture is a website of practical self help resources including audio and video clips:

www.holisticsupportnetwork.co.uk. We were lucky to have a National Lottery grant to help with the website development. One of the key factors about the resources on our new site is their aim to bring people to a place of hope, with the idea that there are new possibilities and new ways forward,. It also aims to increase strength and resilience in dealing with life's



Dr Deborah Bowden (left) and Dr Lynette Bowden celebrating the launch of the new website.

day-to-day struggles.

The resources are presented in a framework of evidence-based help where possible.

Free website resources

The website resources include tracks from the 'Transforming Depres-

sion' CD. This CD was piloted in three GP practices with the help of a lottery grant, and is now used by GPs and NHS resource centres. I recently received a moving email from a recipient who said the CD had helped to save her life. The original CDs are still available for personal or clinical use: we just ask for a donation to cover the cost of postage. All the resources on the site are free to use, and the audio tracks can also be downloaded for a small charge.

Would you like to help?

At the moment, although most of the resources on the new website are my own work, everyone is encouraged to contribute strategies that have worked for them. We welcome involvement from anyone who is interested in helping.

Please get in touch via the contact page on the website or email me directly: lynettebowden@gmail.com



GREEN FINGERS!

By Helen Plowman

Recovery Gardening

The return of our popular gardening series where Helen reflects on how gardening and recovery from ill health have many similarities.



My life was my garden

When I was out of work a few years ago, I was quite frankly unable to work. The DWP and ATOS thought differently, but that is a whole other story. My life was my garden; I lavished daily love and attention on the small patch, which I had chosen as my domain, and I was rewarded with the benefits of a beautiful relaxing space and abundant fresh produce.

Rosy glow of nostalgia

Maybe I'm looking back with the rosy glow of nostalgia, but getting decent food out of the ground and having an attractive, well-ordered garden to enjoy was a huge positive in my life. Things are pretty different now. I have a part time care and support job, which includes "sleeping in" overnight, and a small gardening business. Yet if you were to walk down my street, or look out of my back door, you would not think, "a gardener lives here". In fact you would think that I really hated gardening and never did any! It is chaos, with heaps of salvaged items jostling with overgrown shrubs, dead plants in pots and long grass.

Meeting the needs of others

The reason I hope that this little story will engage even the most horticulturally naive among you is the familiarity of the theme. Working hard to please others, whether in gardening or in health, we are meeting their needs. I acknowledge that I gain a lot through working: a sense of achievement, increase in mastery of skills and knowledge, peer recognition as an 'expert'. All of these things have helped my self-esteem enormously. On the down side, this year I can't just nip out of the back door for a handful of spinach or beans; I'm not meeting my own needs and feeding myself. I have lost the reassuring sense of self-sufficiency and solidity that comes from looking after myself.

Tending my own patch really matters

Coming to the realisation that it's not enough for me just to be a good gardener, and that tending my own patch really matters, has opened my eyes.

This is how we recover, one turning point at a time.

Useful Resources

Sources Of Support

GENERAL:

Doctors.net.uk

www.doctors.net.uk

UK's largest and most active on-line medical community. Contains _ the couch_ providing emotional and professional support through on-line discussion forum and peer-to-peer support

BMA Counselling Service

Tel: 08459 200169

24-hour support with immediate access to trained counsellors.

Support4Doctors

www.support4doctors.org

Website run by the RMBF – aims to put doctors and their families in touch with a range of organisations who can help. Covers: Work & career; Money & finance;

Health & well-being; Family & home

BMA Doctors for Doctors

www.bma.org.uk (click on doctors health & well-being)

Web based resource pack intended as a self-help tool to aid doctors in accessing appropriate help for any difficulties in which they may find themselves. Also contact

with doctor-advisers through BMA Counselling service. For BMA members only.

The Sick Doctors Trust

Tel: 0870 444 5163

www.sick-doctors-trust.co.uk

Undertake to provide early intervention and treatment for doctors suffering from addiction to alcohol or other drugs, thus protecting patients while offering hope, recovery and rehabilitation to affected colleagues and their families.

The British Doctors and Dentists Group

Tel: 0870 444 5163.

Monthly group meetings for doctors recovering from chemical dependency.

Independent Career Assessment

www.medicalforum.com

HOPE for Disabled Doctors

www.hope4medics.co.uk

Help in obtaining professional equality for those with a disability or chronic illness.

SPECIFIC GROUPS:

Medical Womens Federation

www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk

Aims to advance the personal and professional development of women in medicine, to change discriminatory attitudes and practices and to work on behalf of patients.

Psychiatrists Support Service

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/member/psychiatristssupportservice.aspx>

A confidential telephone advice line for members of the Royal College of Psychiatrists covering all subjects including health, career and problems at work

Telephone 020 7245 0412

psychiatristssupportservice@rcpsych.ac.uk

Anaesthetists

Tel: 020 7631 1650

www.aagbi.org

An alternative contact for anaesthetists seeking help

NON-MEDICAL

Mind Tel: 0845 766 0163

www.mind.org.uk

The leading mental health charity in England and Wales. Work to create a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress

Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org.uk

Financial Help

BMA Charities Tel: 020 7387 4499

Including the Cameron Fund

Royal Medical Benevolent Fund

Tel: 020 8540 9194 www.rmbf.org

The Royal Medical Foundation

01372 821011

www.royalmedicalfoundation.org

How to save money on your professional subscriptions while unemployed / on long-term sick leave / working reduced hours

General Medical Council (GMC)

If your **total gross** income (from all sources) is below a set threshold for the relevant year, you can apply for a 50% discount on the annual GMC retention fee - see link below:

[GMC lower incomes](#)



Defence organisations (MDU, MDDUS & MPS)

The Medical Defence Union, the Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland and the Medical Protection Society all offer deferred membership for members who are having a career break. This is offered at no cost but each organisation has slightly different rules on what they are able to offer.

British Medical Association (BMA)

The BMA offers a salary link scheme to allow members with limited **professional** income to pay a reduced subscription fee - see link below:

[BMA subscription rates](#)



Colleges

All of the medical colleges should consider an application to their treasurer for either deferred membership or a reduced subscription rate due to straightened financial circumstances of whatever cause. It is worth addressing this as early as possible as fee reductions are unlikely to be applied retrospectively.

Tax allowances for professional subscriptions

Professional subscriptions are allowable against tax if you are still working as a doctor. Unless you normally receive a significant untaxed (and taxable) income from other sources such as cremation form fees, it is likely that you will profit overall from declaring your professional fees against tax. If you wish to claim professional subscriptions against tax, you will need to provide the Inland Revenue with the relevant details via a Self Assessment tax return.

The advice on this page is offered in good faith but it is the reader's responsibility to assess whether it is appropriate to follow the advice in their own situation. Neither the Doctors Support Network or the author can be held responsible for any consequences of following this advice.

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Continuing Professional Development

Some ideas of where to start with your own CPD:

Journal reading

Obvious, but where most of us begin if only to reduce the mountain of unread journals awaiting our return to work.

Internal teaching sessions

For employed doctors : If feeling well enough, it is possible to ask if you may attend relevant formal teaching sessions at your place of work.

External paid for courses

For employed doctors: If your medical advisers agree that you are well enough to undertake some CPD while on long term sick leave, then it may be worth asking your employer if they will consider funding relevant course fees.

Deanery

Your local deanery may offer a variety of learning opportunities for doctors within the region. If you are on long-term sick leave from an NHS post, you are likely to be able to access some valuable learning sessions for free or at reasonable cost.

BMA library

The BMA has a full medical library service for members with access to books and journals. Books are posted out to you by the library and returned at your expense. It is also possible to request copies of journal articles.

[BMA library services](#)

FREE for BMA members

BMJ Learning Excellent website with hundreds of online modules on clinical and relevant non clinical career development topics

[BMJ learning](#)

FREE for BMA members

Colleges

E-learning : Your college may offer free e-learning modules via their website. N.B. The Royal College of General Practice has some excellent free (for anyone) modules including the e-learning session for the Health for Healthcare Practitioners course.

Courses & conferences : Colleges may offer a reduced rate for retired members and it is worth asking if you could be treated as retired for the purpose of paying conference fees if you are on a career break due to ill health.

FREE for MPS members

IT training

If you are not working and in receipt of a government benefit such as Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA) you should be able to access relevant IT training without cost. There are many different providers, each with their own specific funding criteria in this field. One example of the type of IT training available is the European Computer Driving Licence [ECDL](#) which is widely recognised by the NHS as a badge of proficiency in the use of Microsoft Office. The ECDL qualification counts as 40 hours of CPD and, depending on the provider, may often be followed online at home. Your local Jobcentre Plus may be able to provide you with suggestions of appropriate local IT training providers.

FREE for JSA or ESA claimants

Tax allowances for CPD expenses

If you are still employed or working as a doctor in some capacity, expenses incurred for CPD events may be allowable against tax. You will need to inform the Inland Revenue of your claim for adjustment of your tax allowance .



Medical Protection Society

The MPS offers an excellent series of risk management workshops which are free to members including those with deferred (free) membership.

[MPS courses and workshops](#)

CONTACT THE DOCTORS SUPPORT NETWORK

General:

info@dsn.org.uk

0871 245 8376

Newsletter:

newsletter@dsn.org.uk

DSN is a thriving community of doctors with mental health problems. We offer a range of services from regional support meetings and social events to the more involved such as our flagship service the doctors support line (DSL) - doctors for doctors and entirely confidential. We would love to offer this for free but due to running costs and lack of funds, that would not be sustainable. Free online support can always be reached via our website.

PO BOX 360, STEVENAGE, HERTS, SG1 9AS

WEB: www.dsn.org.uk (login: members@dsn.org / password: bluesky)

DOCTORS SUPPORT LINE: 0844 395 3010 4p/min

SUPPORT MEETINGS

- London & SE** Support meeting are at Sally's house in Ealing, West London. Contact membership@dsn.org.uk
- York** Please contact Rosemary on either 01142305537 or lethem@doctors.org.uk for details
- North West** Regular support meetings or day trips run on an ad-hoc basis. Please contact astrid@dsn.org.uk to attend.
- North East** First Monday of the month (except BH) at 18.00 near Haymarket in Newcastle. Contact Louise@ffzzz.plus.com
- South** Take place in Southampton; please call Helen on 07811 360 880 or email hj.plowman@googlemail.com
- Midlands** Please contact either Ruth at ruth@dsn.org.uk or Joy at joykdz@yahoo.co.uk
- Scotland** Often take place at Malcolm's flat; contact malcolmh@doctors.org.uk
- Wales** Take place in Cardiff; contact Clive at wales@dsn.org.uk

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN SETTING UP A SUPPORT GROUP IN YOUR OWN AREA, OR YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND ANY OF THE EXISTING MEETINGS PLEASE CONTACT US AS ABOVE

THE DSN COMMITTEE

The committee has changed slightly for 2013, with Fiona stepping down as chair at the 2012 AGM.

We would particularly like to thank the volunteers of the Doctors' Support Line, who are not mentioned here.

The committee is now as follows:

Angelika: Chair

Louise: Vice Chair & Senior Editor

Howard: Treasurer

Ajay: Secretary

Sally: Membership Secretary

Rob: Chief Editor (Newsletter & Website)

Fiona: GMC Liaison

Matilda: Conference co-ordinator

Alison: Committee Member

Helen: Committee Member

Clive: DSN Wales

Malcolm: DSN Scotland

Other regular volunteers:

Declan: Forums

Richard: Fundraising

Tanya: DSL

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Come and join us and show your support...



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THE DOCTORS SUPPORT NETWORK

WWW.DSN.ORG.UK

Contact us at info@dsn.org.uk

Peer support
for doctors
suffering
from mental
distress



Confidential



BY
DOCTORS
FOR
DOCTORS



Anxiety



Bipolar
Disorder



Personality
Disorders

Stress



Depression



WE
OFFER

- ✓ Campaigning to reduce the stigma of mental illness
- ✓ Liaising with the GMC, NCAS and PHP
- ✓ Expert advice to those undergoing GMC procedures on health grounds
- ✓ Anonymous email forum
- ✓ social outings and support meetings
- ✓ The Confidential Doctors Support Helpline (see below)

Support Line: 0844 395 3010

Mon, Tues: 8pm - 11pm / Wed, Thurs, Fri: 8pm - 10pm / Sunday: 4pm - 10pm