

PROFESSOR TIM NEWTON ADDRESSES STRESS MANAGEMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH OF THE DENTAL TEAM

At Dentistry Show London in October, Professor Tim Newton presented the session 'Stress management and mental health of the dental team'.

He began his session by identifying the potential sources of stress felt by dental professionals. These can be divided into groups: business-led pressures include retirement and competitors; clinical situation-led pressures cover feeling out of control and being out of your comfort zone; and patient-led pressures may be anxious patients and those with additional needs. Professor Newton added that many find the busy, yet isolated work environment stressful, especially given the negative perspective of dentists from society. The ever-increasing online influence is having more impact on job satisfaction too, with a rise in patients shopping around for services or seeking alternatives to professional dentistry.

These work-related stresses can lead to increased anxiety, depression, poor psychological wellbeing and burnout in professionals. According to Professor Newton, 60–80% of dentists are estimated to be struggling with burnout, which is particularly troubling as it may lead to depersonalisation, and possibly even compromised patient care. Burnout is thought to be worse in dentists working in the NHS and better for both those undergoing further education (like postgraduate studies) and those working in big teams.

Strategies to rectify these issues at a personal and practice level are important. These individual and team approaches may encompass physical, behavioural and cognitive changes. Professor Newton recommended regular exercise and an improved diet including reducing caffeine to help relieve general tension. He also suggested

improving the physical work environment, acknowledging that there is often a strain on dental professionals' eyes and ears too (due to high frequency noise from drills).

Improving time management could also help. It is recommended to identify priorities based on long term personal goals and allocate time accordingly. Consider what is important to you – for many people, family and friends come first, which will help to determine how best to spend your free time. Anything which could intrude on this time should be taken into consideration, however, only those things considered both urgent and important should take priority. For example, routine tasks which are important, but not urgent need not take up your free time unnecessarily and can wait until later.

At a practice level, Professor Newton encouraged dental teams to evaluate how they're feeling regularly. Consider coping strategies and implement the five Ds: delegate, divide, divert, discuss and develop to ensure everyone is able to manage their workload. It's essential for team members to differentiate between things they 'should' do and things they 'must' do. Often, people expect too much of themselves, so it's important that dental professionals are not giving themselves unnecessary rules to follow. Professor Newton recommended creating goals for the practice for review after six months. After this period, assess progress, consider the next steps for further improvements, and involve the team in decision making and ask for feedback.

A delegate attending this session commented: 'Professor Tim Newton was well spoken, and kept his session engaging and light. I am very interested in this topic, and I got what I wanted from it. He covered the topic well, and has definitely given me

food for thought to help re-frame the way I think. Dentistry Show London has educational resources on a good range of subjects, which I am looking into to help me diversify and help to prevent burnout'.

The next Dentistry Show London will be held on Friday 6 and Saturday 7 October 2023.

Have you experienced domestic abuse?

Recent research conducted by the University of Bristol's Centre for Academic Primary Care indicates that healthcare professionals are more likely to experience/to have experienced domestic abuse than members of the general public.¹ In response to this finding, researchers have set up the PRESSURE study (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/primaryhealthcare/researchthemes/pressure-study/>) to gather information about the impact of healthcare professionals' own experiences of domestic abuse.

PRESSURE focuses on PRIMARY and community carE Staff as SURvivors of domestic violence and abUsE.

As part of this, researchers have launched a survey (<https://redcap.link/PRESSURE>) to find out about healthcare professionals' (in primary and community care in England) experiences of domestic abuse/coercive control. The study is independent of the NHS, healthcare regulators, unions, colleges, etc. The survey is for healthcare workers who have experienced abuse, control, or violent behaviour from a partner, ex-partner, or family member, AND for staff who may support healthcare workers – for example staff in HR, OH, and line management roles. The survey asks about experiences and support options. Completion takes 20–40 minutes depending on the level of detail you choose to give. You can save progress and return later. You can skip any questions that you don't want to answer and take breaks.

The research team appreciate that reading and answering questions about domestic abuse can be incredibly difficult. If you have experienced domestic abuse, you are not alone, and there are people ready to listen and help. Details of support options are included in the survey, including the National DA Helpline (0808 2000 247 – 24/7), and Respect Men's Advice Line (0808 8010327 – Mon-Fri 10 am–8 pm).

Reference

1. Dheensa S, McLindon E, Spencer C *et al.* Healthcare professionals' own experiences of domestic violence and abuse: a meta-analysis of prevalence and systematic review of risk markers and consequences. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 2022; doi: 10.1177/15248380211061771.

