

Researchers suggest new ways to improve wellbeing of NHS doctors

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Credit: University of Aberdeen

An interactive app, rest and relaxation spaces, and informal, in-person psychological support are among new ways that have been suggested to

ease the stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic on doctors and trainee medics.

Doctors' wellbeing has suffered significantly since the beginning of the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) according to new research from the University of Aberdeen and the Scottish Medical Education Research Consortium (SMERC) which found that the wellbeing of doctors and trainee medics has been overwhelmingly negatively impacted.

The team of Health Scientists from the University in collaboration with the four other Scottish Medical Schools (Universities of Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews) as well as NHS Education for Scotland report the findings in the Chief Scientist Office (CSO) Rapid Research in COVID report. The CSO call was developed to support research at Scotland's universities, and the University of Aberdeen received almost £1 million to fund research to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Kim Walker from the Centre for Healthcare Research Education and Innovation (CHERI) in the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition at the University was awarded £197,080 of the fund in May 2020 to develop evidence-based interventions to support doctors' wellbeing and promote resilience during the pandemic and beyond. The team interviewed and collected diaries from 100 doctors across all 14 regional health boards. Community and hospital-based specialties were included with interviewees ranging from new graduates to retired doctors who had returned to practice in the pandemic. The outcomes of the interviews were used to inform key stakeholder expert panels in developing and prioritizing interventions.

Five interventions were prioritized for development as a result of the interviews, these include: the provision of rest and relaxation spaces for staff to relax and also eat and drink in an area exclusive to them; the roll

out of the "How Was Your Day" app in which users rate how they feel throughout the day to help inform constructive changes to working practices; active encouragement for staff to use the NHS National Wellbeing Hub—a website that offers health and wellbeing advice; the production of materials highlighting the challenges and experiences faced by GPs working in the pandemic; and the provision of informal, in-person support from specially trained healthcare professionals.

Gill Aitken, co-investigator and Programme Director for MSc Clinical Education at Edinburgh University Medical School, said: "It is a privilege to be part of this Scotland-wide research group. Our work has addressed the lack of a robust evidence base in this area and is developing and evaluating several ways to support wellbeing in healthcare workers. The multidisciplinary nature of the members of the research group has allowed us to develop an innovative, rapid and multi-streamed approach to research this challenging area."

Dr. Anita Laidlaw, co-investigator, from the School of Medicine at the University of St Andrews, said of the project: "We used a theoretically-informed and evidence-based intervention strategy to develop the interventions to support doctors' wellbeing and resilience during this study."

And Dr. Jo Cecil, co-investigator, from the School of Medicine at the University of St Andrews, added: "This research developed a novel framework to facilitate the rapid and rigorous development of complex interventions. This was important due to the immediate pressures faced by doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic."

The lead researcher in Aberdeen, Dr. Kim Walker further explained: "The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified already existing challenges to doctors' wellbeing and it is extremely important to give the workforce a voice, listen to what they are telling us and, fundamentally take action to

address their concerns.

"We know that in supporting [wellbeing](#) in doctors, we then in turn support patient care so it is vital that we do all we can to listen and act upon what we learn."

More information: Final Reports for the Rapid Research in Covid-19 Programme: www.cso.scot.nhs.uk/finalreports/

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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