Burnout and empathy in primary care

Thank you for your editorial on ‘Burnout and empathy in primary care.’ These are crucial, but often neglected, factors in our day-to-day lives as GPs. However, I was surprised that there was no mention of resilience. There is a large body of literature that explores this as a protective characteristic when things get tough. One of the key underlying personal attributes that promotes resilience is personal faith. Many faiths also emphasise compassion and empathy in primary care. Br J Gen Pract 2012; 62(600): 340–347.

My consultation was on an unrelated matter, but during my assessment I asked whether her stoma was functioning well and if there were any plans for reversal, because it seemed from the notes to have been intended as a temporary measure. She was vague about any planned follow-up but said she would be keen to have the reversal. Throughout the consultation I had tried not to be distracted by the Facebook page given pride of place beside the sofa.

When I returned to the surgery it transpired that she had not attended the stoma clinic in 2010 and had then been discharged from follow-up. I arranged for her to be re-entered into the system and phoned her to keep her up to date with developments.

Sitting at home later that evening I couldn’t help but ponder the situation. Although my patient was evidently enthusiastic as soon as I brought up the topic of stoma reversal, she hadn’t picked up the phone to the surgeons or her GP in 2 years … if only she could have found us on Facebook!

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Communication in the 21st century

As a GPST3 I often visit housebound patients who are unable to come to the surgery. Recently I received a request to visit a 40-year-old woman with a complex history of surgery for diverticular disease in 2010, including a Hartmann’s procedure.

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Do English patients want continuity of care, and do they receive it?

Aboulghate and colleagues, in their analysis of GP Patient Survey data, conclude that most people value continuity but that practices need to flexibly balance it against speed of access. Asking patients whether they prefer to see a particular GP invites responses that cannot reflect the complexity of their real decision-making.

We have previously reported a discrete choice experiment study of preferences for access to GPs that showed continuity to be a preference that is context-dependent and of variable importance. Patients balance continuity of care against convenience of appointment time and speed of access, according to the reason for their consultation. Those with a long-standing illness value seeing the GP of their choice seven times as much as rapid access, while for those consulting with a child, rapid access is important. Overall, the extra time that patients in this study were willing to wait to see the doctor of their choice was less than 1 day.

Patients weigh up continuity of care as one of several attributes of the health care they require on a given occasion. The access we provide should reflect those values and its quality measured in more sophisticated ways.

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Confirming death in general practice

In 2008 the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges published a code of practice for