

Life & Times

Looking after you too

NHS England has launched a new primary care initiative to promote resilient working in our teams, to enable us to stay well, and maintain the frontline delivery of primary care.¹ I was fortunate enough to have a coaching session through this service with a professional coach who worked with me on some of the challenges facing us at work currently.

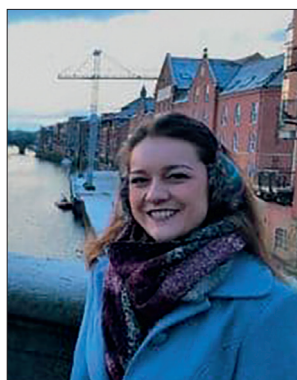
Not only was this really helpful, to allow myself time and space to think about some of the more challenging aspects of work we have been dealing with over the past few weeks, but we looked at ways to develop skills that are protective against burnout in the future, as well as chatting through difficult decisions currently.

REALISTIC OPTIMISM

The two skills we focused on — because apparently I displayed an aptitude for them — were realistic optimism and a sense of humour. The good news is we can train our brains into realistic optimism and if someone thinks my sense of humour is good I'm sure yours will be totally adequate!

Realistic optimism is about accepting that sometimes things aren't OK, but knowing that the hard work we put in will pay off. Feeling bad when things are bad but knowing this too shall pass. Feeling grateful when things are good and knowing you can weather the storm when they are not. As I have said previously: resilience is not about never falling off the horse, it's about how you get back on. Promoting this style of thinking is a good way to encourage getting back in the saddle and enjoying the ride once again.

I spent 45 minutes on Zoom, chatting with my lovely coach Diane about my concerns, things that are out of my control. I spoke of some difficult conversations I have had, how I am finding myself feeling a little guilty at times for not working myself to the bone, how uncomfortable being put on a hero pedestal is and how



Katie Barnett

difficult it can be trying to be supportive to colleagues without seeming patronising.

Now just to clarify, I am OK. I was OK when I booked the call and I am still OK now. Coaching is not only for people who are struggling, it is for everybody. Because if you only start learning ways of keeping well when you are not well it can become like trying to fill a cup while it's still leaking.

In many professions a regular 'debrief' is mandatory. There is so much evidence behind this method as the holy grail of wellbeing. Talking about what has happened to allow you the time and space to process, to take the learning, to reflect on how you move forward, proactively, rather than reactively.

INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

We deal with distressing things day-in day-out, among the fungal nails and coughs and colds we see a raft of pathology. People dying, people struggling to get pregnant, people coping with new diagnoses, people struggling to find a diagnosis, people struggling with their own minds and on and on. And if we don't have an outlet for processing this it will boil under the surface and we will forget why we do this job at all.

Our job is hard, but if we don't

acknowledge the emotional labour we undergo as well as the intellectual, we will stop feeling it. And if we stop feeling it we become bad doctors. In my opinion it is vital that primary care staff have access to a safe space for them to debrief about the difficulties of their job.

There is a reason reflections are such a large part of the trainee portfolio. It is an excellent way of consolidating learning. But it is also the best way to promote self-awareness, empathy, and resilience. And I found doing this with another human rather than as a box-ticking exercise on a website made it much more enjoyable and fulfilling. Coaching is a fabulous tool to enable space and time with an impartial professional to enable primary care to survive and thrive.

So if you haven't checked out the #LookingAfterYouToo initiative have a look, and make sure you are giving yourself the best chance of sustaining your wellness for the future.

Katie Barnett,

Post-CCT Fellow, Haxby Group Practice; Honorary Clinical Fellow, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York.

Email: k.barnett2@nhs.net
[@drkatiebarnett1](https://twitter.com/drkatiebarnett1)

Katie blogs about wellbeing and fellowship at: thefellowshipmonologues.wordpress.com

This article was first posted on *BJGP LIFE* on 8 May 2020; <https://bjgplife.com/lookingafteryoutoo/>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp20X710537>

"Coaching is not only for people who are struggling, it is for everybody. Because if you only start learning ways of keeping well when you are not well it can become like trying to fill a cup while it's still leaking."

REFERENCE

1. NHS England. Looking after you too. #LookingAfterYouToo: coaching support for primary care staff. 2020. <https://people.nhs.uk/lookingafteryoutoo> [accessed 12 Jun 2020].