

Stop talking about resilience!

Resilience (noun):

1. The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

2. The ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity.

Synonyms: flexibility, pliability, suppleness, plasticity, elasticity, springiness, spring, give strength of character, strength, toughness, hardiness.¹

How many times in a day are we hearing the 'R' word in our lives? — if it's not the Prime Minister hailing the keyworkers and NHS frontline for showing up every day to the brutal grinding job of looking after poorly patients in an even more poorly managed organisation, then it's the next webinar/seminar/podcast/webcast/Teams or Zoom meeting on how to manage stress and build up your r*****e.

If you're lucky enough to be a parent (like me), then you also have your child's school sending you reminders to attend the various meetings online or face-to-face to help build up their 'sodding word' in the face of current uncertainties.

If also like me you were redeployed during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, you most probably will have found one of the rooms in your ED, ward, surgery, or department turned into a 'wellness room', with Galaxy instant chocolate sachets, nice smelling candles, dimmed lights, and some cushions and throws around the blue NHS regulation couches (or a red tweed-material sofa donated by a kind consultant or matron who had been trying to get rid of it anyway).

I sometimes honestly wonder if we even know what the word means. Not the definition — the meaning.

THE PRESSURE TO 'BOUNCE BACK'

When we talk about 'bouncing back from a knock-down', do we (or those doing the talking) even realise that bouncing back can only happen if you release the tension first;



that the concept of flexibility and elasticity does not mean that you can continue to stretch it to eternity. That even physics as a science differentiates between elasticity (the ability of a body to return to its original shape WHEN THE FORCE/PRESSURE IS REMOVED) and plasticity (that, when the force applied is too strong and goes beyond the 'elastic limit', the object becomes deformed).

What is it about the last 2 years that makes us think we can rebound back to whatever our normal was then? When are we going to admit that you cannot mass produce resilience in a National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines fashion and apply that to today's 'unprecedented' (that's another word I hate) situation?

Even if the educators and people in charge of our lives and livelihoods could, is it not counterproductive to teach on how-to-up-your resilience when you are in the middle of a battle? When what you need is armour and artillery, you are instead provided with speeches about how to be proud of your slain colleagues and family. We're told to eat well, sleep well, do mindfulness and meditation, and do boxing, or gardening, or singing to take us out of the doldrums of the current situation.

WE HAVE REACHED OUR 'ELASTIC LIMIT'

I emphatically do not want to learn about how to be resilient — I AM resilient, because I am the Asian, brown, Muslim immigrant doctor living in the UK, working in the NHS, looking after my family and friends, and doing what I can for my local community in my own way.

I want someone to understand and acknowledge that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the precipitous collapse of the NHS, and the constant uproar against primary care, I, and many of my colleagues (across the NHS, not just GP trainees), have reached our 'elastic limit' and we have been changed. I won't say deformed, but that word does ring true for many of us still.

We do not exist now as we did 2 years ago, and our needs cannot be met just by giving us dancing and cooking sessions over Zoom, but acknowledging first and foremost that the system has malfunctioned for us, as much as for the patients; that we have been made martyrs on the doorstep of fatigue and burnout by clapping us into forced resilience.

One thing I do know is when you put a dent into an iron rod, you need to use equally similar pressure in the opposite direction to straighten it out.

Acknowledge and accept your role, before you ask me to become resilient.

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REFERENCE

1. Lexico. Resilience. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/resilience> (accessed 1 Dec 2021).

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