

**For immediate release
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New report reveals UK doctors at greater risk of work-related stress, burnout and depression and anxiety than the general population

We welcome the announcement made today by NHS chief Simon Stevens that there will be national funding for a new mental health support scheme which will cover all doctors working in the NHS. The scheme will cover approximately 110,000 more doctors, in addition to those already supported.

A new report published today by the [Society of Occupational Medicine](#) and [The Louise Tebboth Foundation](#) offers evidence that this funding is indeed urgently needed. The report details evidence that UK doctors are at greater risk of work-related stress, burnout and depression and anxiety than the general population. The incidence of suicide, especially among women doctors and for GPs and trainees, is also comparatively high.

What could make a difference to the mental health of UK doctors? A review of the research evidence found that the incidence of mental health problems among doctors is increasing alongside the growing demands and diminishing resources experienced in the healthcare sector.

GPs, trainee and junior doctors appear to be particularly vulnerable, experiencing distress and burnout early in their career.

The stigma associated with disclosing mental health problems and 'a failure to cope' revealed in the report mean that many doctors are reluctant to seek help as they fear sanctions and even job loss.

The report, carried out by Professor Gail Kinman of the University of Bedfordshire and Dr Kevin Teoh of Birkbeck University of London, reviewed research on the mental health of doctors, the factors that increased the risk of poor mental health, and the implications for their own wellbeing and that of their patients.

Professor Kinman commented: *"The findings of our report are alarming. The poor mental health evident among UK doctors and the implications for themselves and their patients should be of grave concern to all healthcare stakeholders. Action is urgently required to address a working environment that can be toxic to health."*

Dr Teoh added: *"It is crucial to provide doctors with more support from recruitment to retirement and develop a culture that challenges the mental health stigma and encourages help seeking."*

Dr Alex Freeman, Chair of The Louise Tebboth Foundation, said: *"This report should be of interest to policy makers, employers, and others who have a responsibility for doctors' mental health. Whilst initiatives to treat and support doctors who are struggling are to be welcomed, what is needed is to develop a healthy working environment. Prevention should be taken seriously, at all stages of a doctor's career. The level of suicide in the profession is of major concern, and support for the bereaved workplace affected by such suicides is lacking. The concerns identified in the report must be taken seriously."*

Consultant Occupational Physician and Chair of the NHS Health at Work Network Dr Shriti Pattani welcomed the report: *“The report highlights the importance of support in the workplace for doctors including emotional support. Occupational Health Services are the experts on the relationship of ‘health and work’ and are well placed to support doctors. Investment in NHS Occupational Health Services is important if they are to provide support to all Healthcare Workers.”*

The report is available at www.som.org.uk and www.louisetebboth.org.uk

Notes to editors

The report highlights several factors that increase the risk of mental health problems among doctors. The most common causes include:

- High workload
- The growing intensity and complexity of the work
- Managing rapid changes within healthcare and
- Low levels of autonomy and support.

Conflict between work and personal life was also a key risk factor for mental health problems among doctors, with GPs again being at particular risk.

As well as having serious consequences for doctors themselves, the report finds evidence that current working conditions and associated mental health problems are linked to the poor retention and high turnover rates in medicine. There are also major implications for patient outcomes and the financial performance of healthcare organisations.

The report highlights the need to provide evidence-based interventions to improve working conditions alongside increased support to help individual doctors cope with their demanding working environment.

Interventions recommended included ‘job crafting’, where employers adjust the employees’ roles to fit their needs and preferences, and ‘Schwartz Rounds’, an initiative developed in the United States where healthcare staff can meet each month for a one-hour session to share and reflect upon the social, emotional and ethical challenges of their work.

Burnout and GP retention

- A high level of burnout among trainee GPs has been found as early as the first year of training.
- There is evidence that burnout may be increasing among GPs. A Pulse survey of 2,230 UK practitioners found that 74% felt emotionally exhausted, representing an increase of 4% over a two-year period.
- The 2017 National GP Work-Life Survey reported that 35% out of 1,172 GPs intended to quit medicine in the next five years. This had increased from 31% in 2012 and was the highest recorded since the survey began in 1998. An increase in leaving intentions was found among younger as well as older GPs.

Work-related stress

- Data from the 2017 NHS Staff Survey (that sampled 34,255 medical and dental staff) revealed that 33% of consultants and 36% of doctors-in-training reported feeling unwell due to work-related stress in the previous 12 months.
- The BMA Quarterly Survey in 2017 indicated that 50% of the 422 doctors who responded reported feeling unwell due to work-related stress during the previous year. More than six out of ten respondents (61%) felt their stress levels had increased during this period, while only 6% indicated they had reduced.

Suicide

- The actual suicide rate for doctors has been estimated at between two and five times the general population. Historically, female doctors have been considered at higher risk than

the national average for females (up to four times higher), whereas men appear less vulnerable than the general population.

Disclosing work-related stress

- The stigma surrounding mental health problems in medicine is well illustrated by a recent survey of 1,954 UK doctors (60% female; 20% GPs) that found a discrepancy between how respondents thought they would behave if they experienced mental health problems and how they actually behaved. Overall, 73% of the sample reported that they would disclose mental health difficulties, but only 41% who had personally experienced such problems actually divulged them. Trainees, younger doctors and locums were less inclined to disclose due to fears about being labelled, concerns about confidentiality, and a lack of knowledge about the available support structures.
- The 2017 NHS England Staff Survey found that 23% of consultants, 20% of trainees and 24% of other doctors and dentists who were sampled had experienced bullying, harassment or abuse in the previous year.

Sickness absence and presenteeism

- The sickness absence rate in the NHS is 27% higher than the UK public sector overall and 46% higher across all sectors. Nonetheless, there is evidence that doctors under-report illness and take a third fewer sick days than other healthcare workers.
- Sickness presenteeism among doctors is particularly high. The findings of the 2017 NHS Staff Survey showed that 38% of doctors-in-training and consultants reported working while sick in the previous three months.
- Doctors work while sick for several reasons such as short-staffing, feelings of responsibility to their patients, fear of letting colleagues down, the need to present a 'healthy' image at work and concerns for their future career prospects.

The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) is the UK organisation for all healthcare professionals working in or with an interest in occupational health. The SOM is concerned with the protection of the health of people in the workplace; the prevention of occupational injuries and disease; and related environmental issues. For more information please visit:

www.som.org.uk

The Louise Tebboth Foundation aims to provide financial assistance to projects and services which support the mental well-being of doctors in England and Wales and initiatives assisting the bereaved families of doctors who have died by suicide. Visit the website at:

www.louisetebboth.org.uk

Direct correspondence to:

Professor Gail Kinman

Gail.Kinman@beds.ac.uk

Tel: 07802 714950

Dr Kevin Teoh

k.teoh@bbk.ac.uk

Tel: 07923 376812

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