



**ROYAL
COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS
OF IRELAND**

Looking After Your Health & Wellbeing - A Guide For Doctors





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How to use this guide

This is a comprehensive guide of advice and supports that are available to you as trainees within the RCPI. This guide is intended as a reference point for advice for trainees, created by trainees. It does not have to be read cover to cover, but you can instead look at the sections relevant to use at the time of reading and look at other sections in the future.

If you are using the e-version of this booklet, clicking on the titles in the contents page should bring you to that relevant section.

If you are looking to see supports available to you at a glance - see supports available to you (figure 18) or the self-help algorithm (figure 19) in the help and advice section.



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Introduction

Our RCPI Health and Wellbeing Department was officially launched in October 2019 to enhance Trainee and Trainer wellbeing within RCPI.

Our mission is to help doctors enhance their wellbeing and professional conduct throughout their working lives. We will do this by promoting better training practices and providing support for doctors who need it.

This department provides support and referral pathways for Trainees who are struggling to meet the training requirements or reach the competencies required for reasons related to their health or overall wellbeing. We aim to be actively involved in early identification and prevention of issues, the promotion of wellbeing, and strategic planning and collaboration within this area. The department is staffed by a full-time psychologist, Hadas Levy B.A. Psychology, M.Sc. Counselling Psychology, with administrative support.

What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing relates to your physical, social, and mental state. Our wellbeing depends on six main domains:

1. **Economic resources**
2. **Work and participation**
3. **Relationships and care**
4. **Community and environment**
5. **Health**
6. **Democracy and values**



Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Wellbeing requires that basic needs are met, that you have a sense of purpose, and that you feel able to achieve important goals, to participate in society and to live the life you value and have reason to value.

Your wellbeing is enhanced by conditions that include financial and personal security, meaningful and rewarding work, supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, a healthy and attractive environment (to live and work in) and values of democracy and social justice. This is illustrated nicely in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs above (Figure 1).

Why Does Physician Wellbeing Matter?

The evidence is clear: Doctors who enjoy good mental health and are 'engaged' achieve better patient outcomes. The wellbeing of an individual doctor, aside from being desirable, is essential in maintaining high standards and safety in medicine.

Doctors are not immune to illness and mental distress. Some studies even suggest that doctors are more prone to mental ill health than the general population.

In Ireland, doctors are becoming more vocal about the high prevalence of mental health disorders in the profession and the challenging working conditions that contribute to this.

The importance of self-care is evidenced by the fact that the Medical Council has referenced it in its three pillars of professionalism. (Figure 2.)



Figure 2. Pillars of Professionalism

The **Medical Council** has a section of their website dedicated to doctor's wellbeing, and have also created a guide for doctor's wellbeing, as well as a short video on the topic. Doctor wellbeing is an important topic for the Medical Council as outlined in their Statement of Strategy and business plan. The Medical Council recognises that the health and well-being of doctors is key to supporting the quality and safety of patient care.

Visit their resources online:

- [Web page](#)
- [Wellbeing guide](#)
- [Wellbeing video](#)
- [Wellbeing tips video](#)
- [Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners.](#)

The second pillar- **practice**- mentions the importance of self-care for doctors.

Self-care: Doctors are entitled to good care and support from their colleagues and employers when they suffer ill-health. However, they should make sure that the condition of their own health does not cause patients harm. You should seek and follow independent medical advice promptly when you have signs of physical or mental ill-health. You should also take all reasonable steps to protect yourself and your colleagues when treating patients who may be violent or pose other risks to the health or safety of those caring for them.

Our Advice to Doctors

We recommend that you take note of the advice and resources in this booklet. We are committed to supporting physician wellbeing throughout doctors' working lives and this web resource is designed to help you look after your own wellbeing.

We advise you to monitor your physical and emotional wellbeing and to seek assistance early if you have any concerns or feel you are experiencing significant stress. It is important to adhere to the medical advice and management plans of doctors who treat you. You have a responsibility to yourself, your family, your patients and the healthcare system to take good care of your health.

Being a patient can be difficult for doctors. Likewise, caring for other doctors requires particular sensitivity and skill. Doctors who treat other doctors might make assumptions about the doctor patient's knowledge and might ask them to organise and interpret their own investigations.

We encourage doctors to provide support and assistance to colleagues in a confidential, sensitive and professional manner. This means reiterating the importance of the GP role, ensuring it is not by-passed and discouraging the casual or 'corridor consultation'.



Physical Health

A Healthy Body is one in which you feel good, and which allows you to do the things you need and want to do.

We all know that healthy behaviours are essential when it comes to looking after yourself but given the busy and stressful nature of the medical profession, they can be hard to implement in your daily routine.

Doctors are great at looking after others but can often neglect themselves, we are all guilty of it. What we need to realise is how much a healthy lifestyle can benefit our own work ethic and in turn the health of our patients. It is important for our overall health, mental wellbeing, and energy levels. If we don't look after ourselves it can lead to things like burnout very easily.

Doctors frequently impart lifestyle advice to patients but looking after oneself and seeing oneself as a role model for others (including patients) can be more powerful than words of advice. (Figure 3.)

We hope to give you some helpful tips around sleep, exercise and a healthy diet taking both our own and our colleagues' personal experiences into account



Figure 3

Eating Healthily

As we all know busy doctors often skip meals and rely on a quick fix of high carbohydrate food or drinks for energy often supplemented with caffeine. It can be hard to motivate oneself to prepare a nutritious meal at the end of a long stressful day. Our aim is to provide you with some easy tips and tricks to maintain a healthy diet taking this busy lifestyle into account.

At its core the key components of a healthy diet include the following: (Figure 4.)

- 5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day
- Hydrate with at least 2 litres of water a day
- A good source of protein with every meal
- Avoid sugary drinks, snacks and sauces where possible
- Build your meals around whole unprocessed foods when possible.



Figure 4 Healthy Eating

That's all well and good but it's the time and effort that goes into this that poses the challenge.

Here are some top tips from experienced NCHDs:

- Plan your meals for the week ahead and use this to make a list for doing your weekly shop (this also helps avoid unnecessary food purchases).
- Try to dedicate one day a week to prepping meals which saves time and ensures you always have a healthy meal waiting for you no matter how busy things get.
- Lots of small changes add up - make small changes to meals like changing to wholemeal/grain foods, low fat cooking options, and changing snacks from chocolate/crisps/sweets to fruits/nuts/vegetables.
- Overnight oats for breakfast - super quick and easy to make and you can grab as you're heading out the door, preferable to skipping breakfast.
- Always have a snack on hand while at work (especially on call!) such as a protein bar in case you are too busy to take a break/get caught on a ward round/at an emergency.
- Bring a water bottle to work and carry it around with you/leave it where you will see it and be reminded to keep drinking throughout the day.
- Drink a glass of water each time you walk on to a new ward/pass a water fountain.
- Make sure you take your morning coffee break to replenish your energy, it will improve the productivity of the team overall.

Some specific tips for eating habits while on nights:

- Try to pack healthy meals and snacks from home - avoid falling into the vending machine trap if at all possible
- Stick to your usual routine - have a large meal (dinner) before going in to work, eat light snacks throughout the night and then something small (breakfast like food) before going to bed the next morning
- Hydrate! Again bring a water bottle around with you if you can and remind yourself to keep drinking throughout the night
- Avoid caffeine in the morning - this will prevent you from getting a good night's sleep before your next shift



If you try out even a few of these tips we promise you will see the benefits and effect on your productivity and energy levels.

There are many resources now available on the web and elsewhere that will help you achieve a healthy diet without spending hours preparing food. You can find more information on guidelines, healthy meals and easy recipes at the following links:

- [Healthy Ireland Food Plans & Guides](#)
- [Healthy Eating Guidelines and Resources](#)
- [Meal prep recipes](#)
- [Weekend Meal Prep Recipes](#)

Sleep

We now know that sleep is an active state and that quality sleep is essential for high level cognitive function as well as motor function, mood and physical health. It can however be elusive for doctors working long hours on shift or on call. This is particularly the case when you need to combine work with social life, family life (including small children) and/or the academic demands of a training post (research and exams).

Lack of sleep is significantly associated with depression in doctors but whether by cause or effect is unclear. The relationship between sleep loss and cognitive performance in doctors is well documented, as is its impact on motor performance. Long term sleep deprivation associated with shift work is associated with physical ill health, particularly affecting the cardiovascular and gastrointestinal systems.

Here we share some tips and useful resources for better sleep. Even some simple changes can make a big difference.

Tips for better sleep:

- Creating a sleep-inducing bedroom - black out blinds, noise reduction and ensuring your room is an ambient temperature for sleep
- Optimizing your sleep schedule - it is important to go to bed at the same time each day as well as getting up at the same time each day. Doing this 7 days a week will overall improve your sleep quality and habits

- Crafting a pre-bed time routine
- Fostering pro-sleep habits during the day - avoid naps if possible during the day, especially naps in the evening
- Avoid eating within 4 hours of bed especially large, spicy meals
- No caffeine 8 hours before bedtime
- No screens 1 hour before bedtime
- Turn off the backlight on your phone to reduce LED exposure
- Buy an alarm clock instead of having your phone in the room

The 20-minute rule can be very helpful if you find yourself having difficulty falling asleep at night time. After approx 20 minutes of lying in bed:

1. Get up and go to a dimly lit room - this should ideally be a room other than your bedroom
2. Do something relaxing - try reading a book, listening to music or an audiobook
3. Avoid using your phone or screens at this time
4. Wind down until you are feeling tired and ready to return to bed for sleep

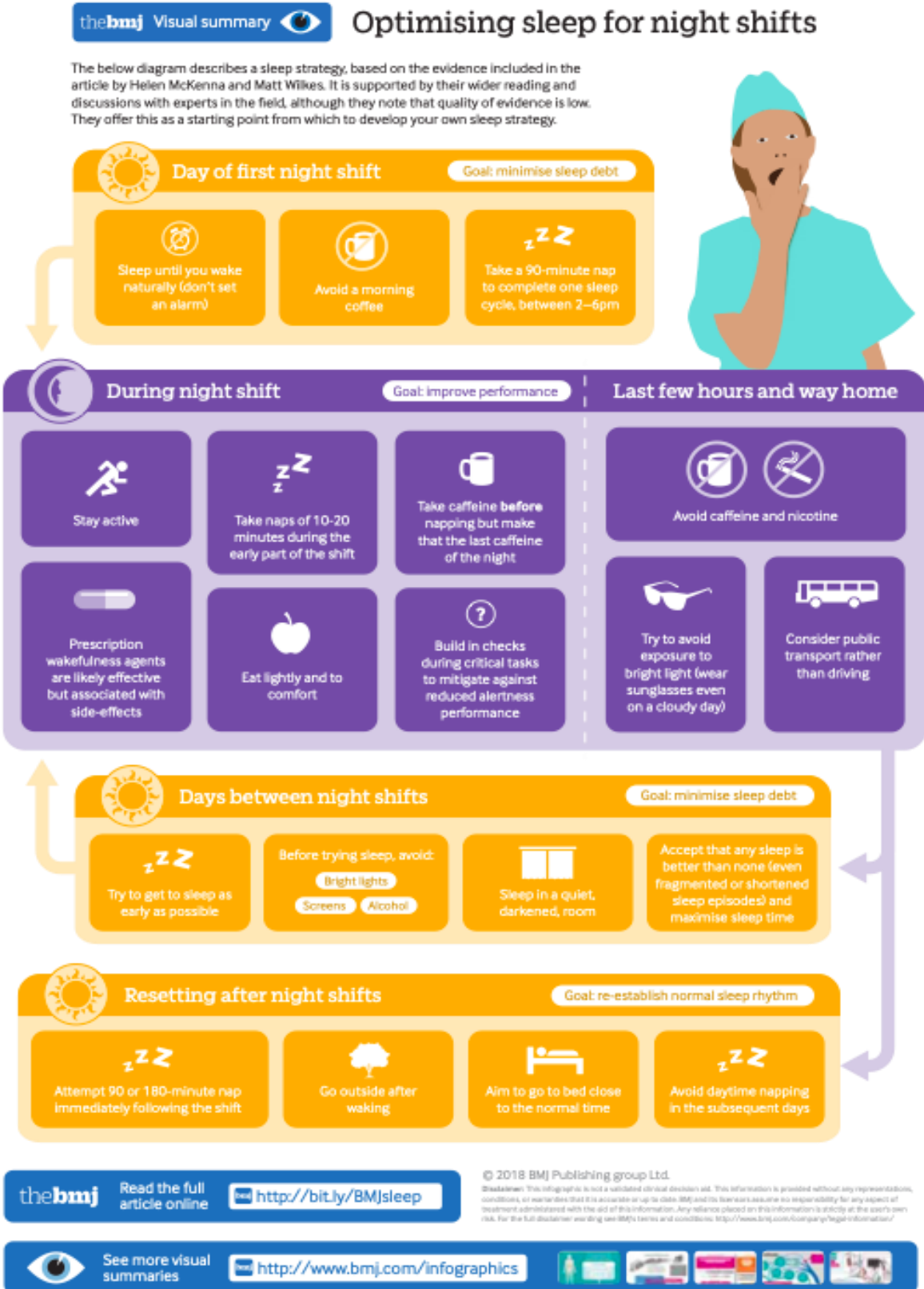
Specific tips for night shifts

The BMJ has created a helpful infographic (figure 5) with tips for sleep optimisation around night shifts, overleaf.

You can find more resources at these links:

- [Healthy Sleep Tips from the Sleep Foundation](#)
- [Twelve Simple Tips to Improve Your Sleep | Healthy Sleep](#)
- [BMJ - Optimising sleep for night shifts \(Figure 5\).](#)

Figure 5. Optimising sleep for night shifts



Exercise

Maintaining optimal health through exercise brings benefits both to physical and emotional health. It is essential to make time for it if we can, especially when life is busy and stressful. We do realise that this is sometimes easier said than done but even small changes can make a big difference. Any form of exercise that you enjoy and can fit in around your lifestyle however small will benefit you, not everyone needs to run a marathon.

WHO recommends at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise 5 times a week. You can find more information on this [on their website](#).

Here we share some suggestions for how to incorporate exercise into your routine (Figure 6., Figure 7.):

- Sign up for the bike to work scheme
- Make a point of taking the stairs rather than the lift at work
- Walk or cycle to work if possible
- If your commute is too long to walk / cycle, consider walking part of the way - e.g. get on the bus at a later stop, or get off earlier and walk the rest of the way
- Consider buying a fitbit or something similar to help keep track of your daily step count/active minutes throughout the day
- Go for a walk after work to help wind down and get some fresh air while getting your steps up
- Consider hiking at the weekends - a great way to exercise and see new places
- Choose an activity that you enjoy and you will be motivated to keep doing it! Exercise should not be a chore, but something you enjoy doing. Finding something you love will be good for both your physical AND mental health. Finding colleagues who are also interested in increasing their activity can help keep you accountable and also adding a social aspect to fitness ie. Tag rugby team, run/walking club, fitness class
- Goal setting - start off with small targets e.g. 1 run a week and gradually increase
- Consider online fitness classes/programmes for short high intensity workouts (15-20 minutes each) designed to fit around a busy schedule at a time that suits you

- Create a routine and be consistent - we are more likely to follow through with a plan to run on Mondays, Wednesday and Saturdays rather than saying we will just try run 3 times a week

Find more information on physical activity guidelines and fun suggestions here:

- <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/health/physical-activity-guidelines/>
- <https://www.theirishroadtrip.com/category/things-to-do-in-ireland/hikes-and-walks/>
- <https://www.fitbit.com/global/us/motivation/challenges>
- <https://www.biketowork.ie/>



Figure 6

EASY WAYS TO MAKE TIME FOR FITNESS ON A BUSY SCHEDULE



Wake up 30 mins earlier



Watch one less Netflix episode at night



Take a walk during your lunch break



Watch TV while walking on a treadmill or working out



Skip the elevator or escalator and take the stairs



Schedule your workouts like you would an appointment

@cheatdaydesign

Figure 7

Work and the body

Work is generally good for us. According to a consensus statement by health professionals, work can promote good physical and mental health, help to prevent ill-health and play an active part in helping people recover from illness. It is important to think about what helps you to enjoy work and how you can focus on this to reap the benefits.

The following are some options to explore:

- A Work Flow and how to get into this 'flow' space at work - <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-flow-2794768>
- Creativity at work e.g. QI projects, step challenges; anything that can increase joy at work
- Building personal and professional relationships e.g. mentors, buddy systems
- Knowing your rights at work (read the NCHD contract)
- Less than full-time working options
- Support services available through work (You can find further details on this in the help and advice section)
- '15 seconds 30 minutes' social movement (Figure 8).

What is 15seconds 30minutes?

15s30m is a social movement encouraging staff to spend an extra **15 seconds on a task now** which could save **someone else 30 minutes later on** to **reduce frustration and increase joy at work.**

How does it work?

Collecting ideas from staff by chatting with them, asking them what they find frustrating at work, how they think the day could be made easier

Running **15s30m workshops** to re-engage staff with why they enjoy working in healthcare, what makes "a good day"

Showing how even the smallest of tasks can **improve patient experience and outcomes** through helping each other

Creating a **15s30m mission** you can start tomorrow, a task which takes only a few seconds and costs nothing but can **reduce frustration and increase joy for others**

Figure 8. 15 seconds 30 minutes social movement

For this to be achieved, hazards in the work environment need to be appropriately controlled (Figure 9).

The main physical health problems encountered in work are musculoskeletal in nature (i.e., back pain and injury, neck pain etc). These are less common in doctors than in other health professionals (e.g., nurses) who are more engaged in patient-handling activities. You are encouraged to contact your GP or Occupational Health Department (OHD) for guidance in managing these problems if they arise. Frequently, work-based physiotherapy programmes, accessible through OHD, are provided by employers.

Frequent hand washing, which is necessary for safe patient care, can sometimes impact on skin health and occupational health staff can advise you on the prevention and management of occupational dermatitis.

Protection against potential occupational infections (e.g., hepatitis, influenza, TB) can be achieved by appropriate vaccinations which should be available on site through OHD. Advice is also available on management of potential exposures to infection e.g., needle-stick injury. For more information, [visit the HPSC website](#).



Figure 9. Healthcare Workers Occupational Hazards

Psychological Health

Stress in medical careers

Modern medical careers combine the stresses and demands of professional life (patients, their families, and the ever-present threat of legal challenges and complaints) and the pressures of interpersonal relationships both at home and at work.

During training the demands of work on top of the need to pass examinations and complete research and audits can be overwhelming. Individuals respond differently to pressure and in a variety of ways. While some exhibit resilience and can focus under pressure, others might feel lost, disconnected and stressed.

A certain amount of stress can motivate us and improve our performance - this is healthy stress. We can, however, reach a threshold where we become so stressed our performance begins to go downhill - this is unhealthy stress, as described by the Yerkes Dodson theory (Figure 10.).

Burnout occurs at the extreme right of this curve and can occur to any trainee during their career. Previous studies carried out by RCPI show burnout occurring in 30% of doctors. Burnout is a work-related syndrome consisting of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion which results in the decreased ability to cope with the demands of work.

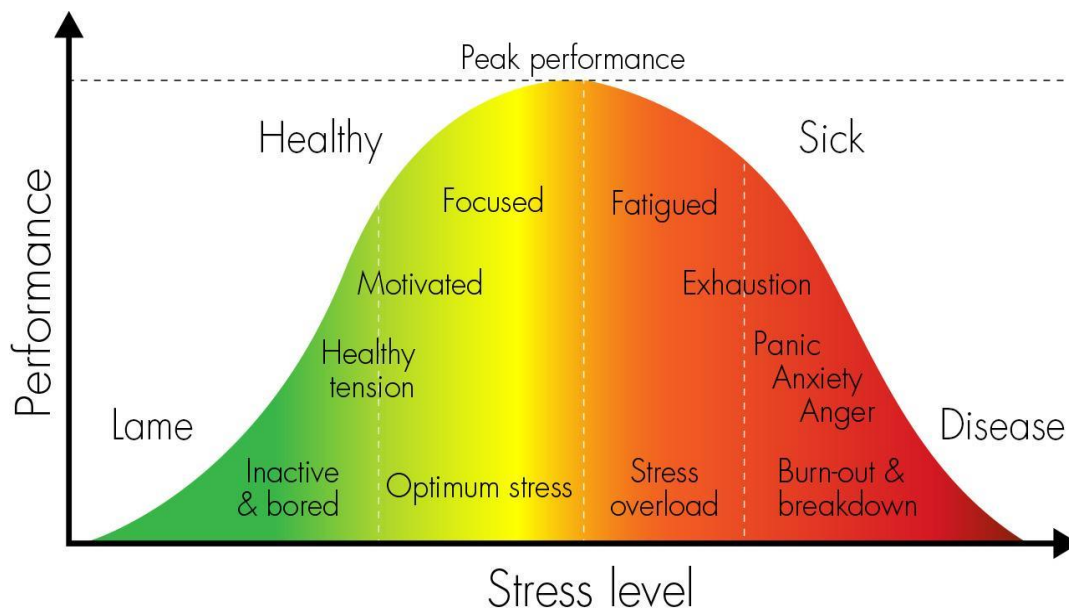


Figure 10. Yerkes Dodson theory

We are all different regarding the levels of stress which will be healthy for us versus that which will be unhealthy, and different situations will create different amounts of stress for us. What is important is to have an awareness for yourself, and not to be afraid to seek help if your stress is becoming overwhelming. We can easily fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others, and feeling we need to constantly push ourselves further. There are always people available to help us, often all we need to do is ask.

Doctors and mental illness

According to the Medical Council, the number of referrals to the Health Committee is rising. Doctors are not immune to mental illness and in some respects can be more vulnerable.

According to the UK Department of Health (Mental Health & Ill Health in Doctors, 2008), research suggests that doctors have higher rates of mental disorders than the general population.

Problems with alcohol, drugs and depression are particularly common. Up to 7% of doctors will have a substance use problem during their lifetime.

Suicide rates have also increased, particularly in female doctors. Doctors' access to prescription drugs plays a part in their risk of substance use and suicide, as well as making it easier to treat themselves rather than seeking appropriate channels of help.

Doctors find it more difficult to access help

Research in Ireland and internationally indicates that doctors do not access the same supports or in the same way as non-medics in relation to mental and physical health care.

Doctors feel immense pressure to 'not give in' to ill health and do not take time off when they are unwell (known as 'presenteeism'). In an Irish study of GP trainees' attitudes to self-health care, 61% of whom worked in hospitals, nearly half (49%) admitted to neglecting their own health.

Doctors can find it more difficult to access help either because of practical (time, access, available confidential resources) or psychological issues (fear of consequences, shame) which in turn leads to availing of self-care and self-medication routes. Doctors are more

likely to talk to peers or family members about problems and not to seek the help of professionals. When they do seek professional help, then confidentiality is paramount.

Doctors generally tend to be perfectionists, overly conscientious, approval seeking, and need to be in control. They may be self-doubting and uncomfortable with praise. While these qualities may be good for patient care, they are counterproductive to optimal management of one's own health.

How do I know if there is a problem?

Generally speaking, our body tells us if there is a problem. The body will send us messages that something might be off track and it is important to listen to these cues, and consider that they may be more than the normal reaction to sleep deprivation.

The difficulty for many doctors is that most of these signals are also found in sleep-deprived conditions, which is a reality for most doctors in training. Some examples might be:

- Difficulties with sleep
- Difficulties with food (eating too much, too little, eating unhealthy food)
- Pain and discomfort (headaches, neck and back pain, bowel and stomach issues)
- Intellectual difficulties (decision making, problem solving, memory, concentration)
- Emotional 'flooding' (crying easily, feeling angry and frustrated, feeling stressed all the time)
- Feeling anxious (pain in the chest, difficulty breathing, feeling dizzy)
- Getting sick easily
- Feeling sluggish and generally not yourself and not well
- Withdrawing from relationships and from social interactions
- Self-medicating
- Missing work or other commitments
- Taking longer to complete work
- Excessive alcohol intake
- Use of recreational drugs
- Excessive exercising or withdrawal from exercise.

The importance of a healthy mind in maximising the benefits of a healthy body cannot be underestimated. Have a look at Dr Siegel's [Healthy Mind Platter](#) for further information and tips. (Figure 11)



Figure 11. The Healthy Mind Platter

Bullying and Harassment

Bullying at work is defined by the HSE Dignity at Work policy as '**repeated** inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at a place of work and / or in the course of employment, which could be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work'.

Harassment (other than sexual harassment) is defined by the HSE Dignity at Work policy as 'any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the discriminatory grounds covered by the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2008.'

We encourage doctors who experience harassment or bullying to make use of their employing organisation's policies and procedures around such behaviour.

Many employers now have formal and informal avenues for seeking support and advice. Your Medical Manpower Manager or a human resources (HR) professional can advise you on the appropriate steps to take.

Where such supports are unavailable, a confidential discussion with a peer or colleague who is not involved in the situation may also be helpful.

RCPI has an anti-bullying and harassment policy, available to all physicians: [Click here to view the policy.](#)

The HSE also has a Dignity at Work policy. This covers sexual harassment and harassment as outlawed by the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2008 and workplace bullying and reflects the experiences of both employers and union representatives in dealing with complaints of bullying and harassment. [Click here to view the policy.](#)

Civility In The Workplace

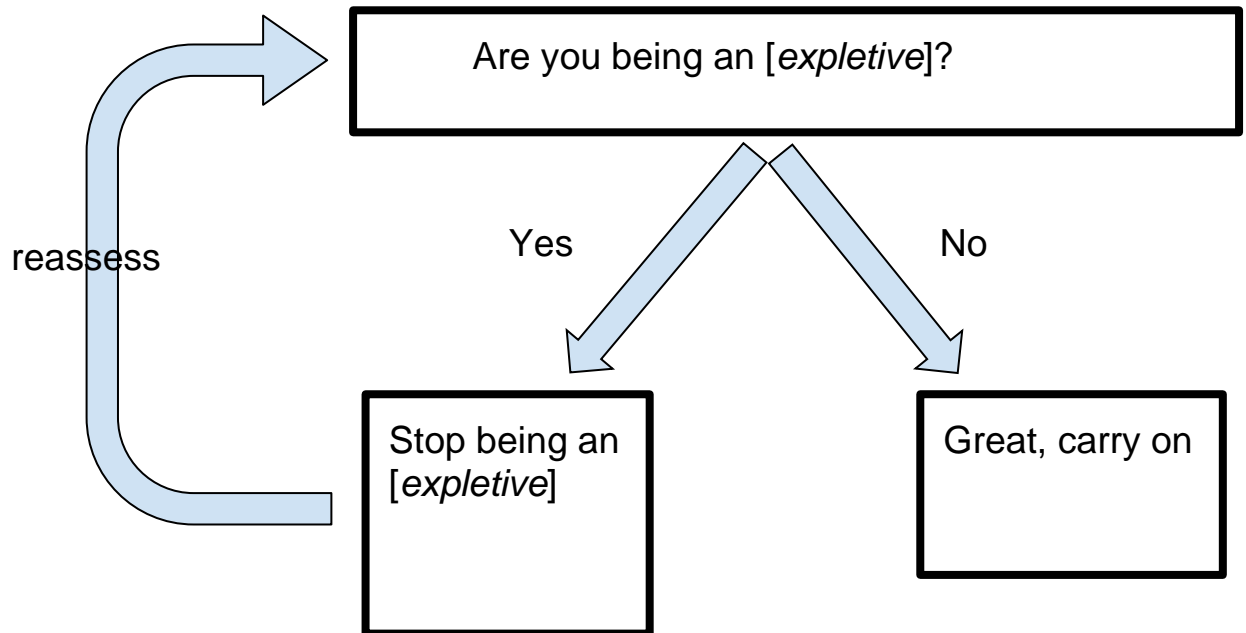


Figure 12. Civility Made Simple

There are several stressful factors that we can't control in our work, but one factor that we can control is how we treat each other. Civility not only improves our experience of work, but it also improves our performance at work, which has a knock-on effect in improving teamwork and patient outcomes.

Some useful resources for improving civility and boosting morale in the workplace are as follows:

1. **Civility Saves Lives** - [Click here to access](#)

- This UK-based website provides a wealth of resources for promoting civility in healthcare
- They provide a list of evidence-based practices, infographics, stories from frontline workers, and links to further resources
- Some of their infographics are reproduced overleaf (with permission)- (Figures 13&14.)

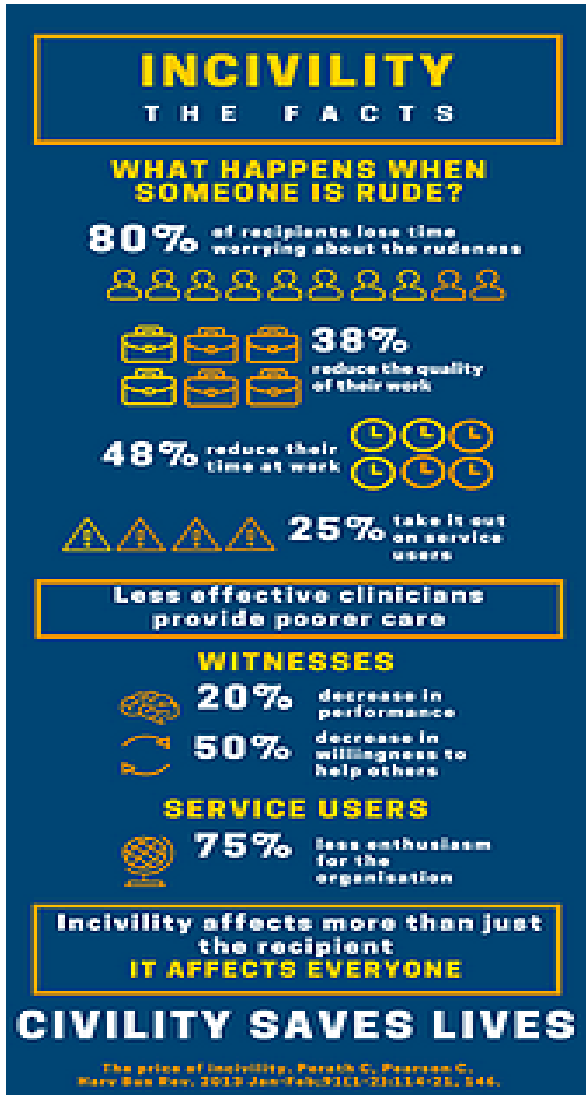


Figure 13. Incivility: The Facts. Click the image to view the original infographic in full screen

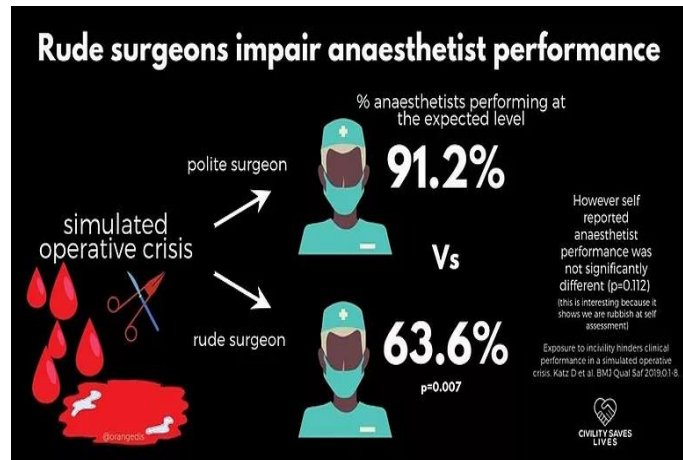


Figure 14. Rude surgeons impair anaesthetist performance. Click the image to view the original infographic in full screen

2. Learning from Excellence (LfE) – [Click here to access](#)

- This UK-based initiative aims to optimise staff morale and staff performance by recognising and investigating excellence
- 'Excellence Reports' focus on an Asset-based approach ('What went well?', rather than the traditional Deficit-focused 'What went wrong?' approach)
- Benefits for staff
 - Recognise 'everyday excellence' (often overlooked)
 - Boost morale
 - Encourage best practice
- Benefits for the organisation/department
 - Reflective learning for all staff (e.g. discussing Excellence Reports at staff meetings)
 - Compliments existing incident reporting structures
 - Recognises and celebrates innovation
- LfE has already been successfully introduced to a number of hospitals across Ireland
 - If you are interested in introducing LfE to your department as a QI initiative, the website above contains a variety of resources

3. Mentors and Buddy Systems

Buddy	Mentor
E.g. a co-SHO	E.g. a Consultant or Trainer
Informal role	Formal structured role
Usually self-selected by an individual	Usually assigned by an organisation
Peer (or Near-Peer) level	More senior level
No formal training requirement	Some formal training required
Tend to focus on short-term goals (e.g. exams)	Tend to focus on longer-term goals (e.g. career progression)

Both have a role, and both can help to support you in your personal and professional life.

4. Flattening The Hierarchy

- Members of staff are more likely to speak up and correct a colleague if they feel psychologically safe doing so
- This is particularly important in complex work environments like healthcare, where a senior clinician can still make significant and life-threatening errors
- By flattening the hierarchy, we can ensure that all members of staff feel comfortable contributing to patient care and correcting seniors when necessary
- Some examples of flattening the hierarchy include;
 - Using first-name terms for all team members (rather than 'Prof' or 'Dr. X.')
 - Senior staff specifically inviting more junior members to offer input (e.g. a daily reminder, "If I miss anything during the ward round, please feel free to remind me.")
 - Replacing 'Why' questions with other forms (e.g. instead of asking "Why did you send bloods?", consider instead "I noticed you sent bloods on that patient, what were your concerns?")



Building Resilience

Adapting to stress and adversity

Psychological resilience is defined as your ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity.

Resilience is a component of our make-up that can be harnessed given the right conditions.

This understanding derives from the notion of human flourishing, which embodies autonomy, self-determination, interest and engagement, aspiration and motivation, and whether people have a sense of meaning, direction or purpose in life. Resilience can be advanced through the acknowledgement and development of people's capabilities.

Here are some key strategies to build and maintain resilience.

Building strong relationships

A career in medicine can at times be stressful and while you are busy building a career, working long shift hours, changing locations through rotations, little time is left over for developing strong relationships. However, putting the time and effort into getting to know your teammates can hugely help with stress levels and boost team morale.

Build Strong Relationships with colleagues through different means:

Quotes from trainees:

"I was struggling to pass one of my written papers and getting quite down about it. I had gotten on really well with my consultant, so we went for a coffee and talked through my worries and together came up with a new strategy plan, which really helped me and made me feel supported."

"I was dreading one of my jobs on the BST because of the heavy workload and long hours of work required, however I actually enjoyed it the most out of all my jobs. The regs, SHOs and interns had lunch together every day and we got to know each other well. This led to great morale on the team and a sense of togetherness."

Actions that can help build and maintain good working relationships:

- Using first names with each other.
- Actively listening to your colleagues and showing them that you are engaging with them.
- Communicating openly and honestly with your work colleagues and being clear about what you want to get across.
- Actively checking in with your colleagues, especially more junior members of the team. If you are concerned, ask someone how they are.
- Making the effort to have lunch/ tea breaks together and getting to know each other outside of the ward/ clinical area.
- Organising regular informal journal clubs or teaching sessions.

Good relationships with close family members, friends and others are important. Accepting help and support from those around you who care and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit you.

In addition to your friends and family, try to have one or two people at work who you feel you can call on for support. This is particularly important if you are doing acute call. If you are having difficulties, it is important to remember that you can inform your Trainer without disclosing the details to him/her.

Challenge your language and your thoughts in difficult situations

Pay close attention to words like “this is awful” and “this is terrible” and “I can’t cope” or “I have had enough”.

You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try instead to say “this is difficult, but I am resourceful enough to be able to cope” or “this is not the end of the world, however difficult this is for me right now. I have what I need to get through this”.

Note any subtle changes whereby you feel a bit better as you deal with difficult situations. This will build your confidence in your own coping abilities in the future.

Think about your mindset when it comes to yourself and your work. There is a concept in psychology known as “growth mindset” and “fixed mindset”. (Figure 15.) In a growth mindset, people believe that their ability at any task, rather than being fixed, can always be improved with hard work, study and perseverance. This is in contrast to a fixed mindset,

where people believe their ability is fixed at a certain level and that they have no control over increasing their talents or abilities. Working as a junior doctor with a “growth mindset” might encourage you to take on new challenges, see the learning point in all experiences and not fear failure.

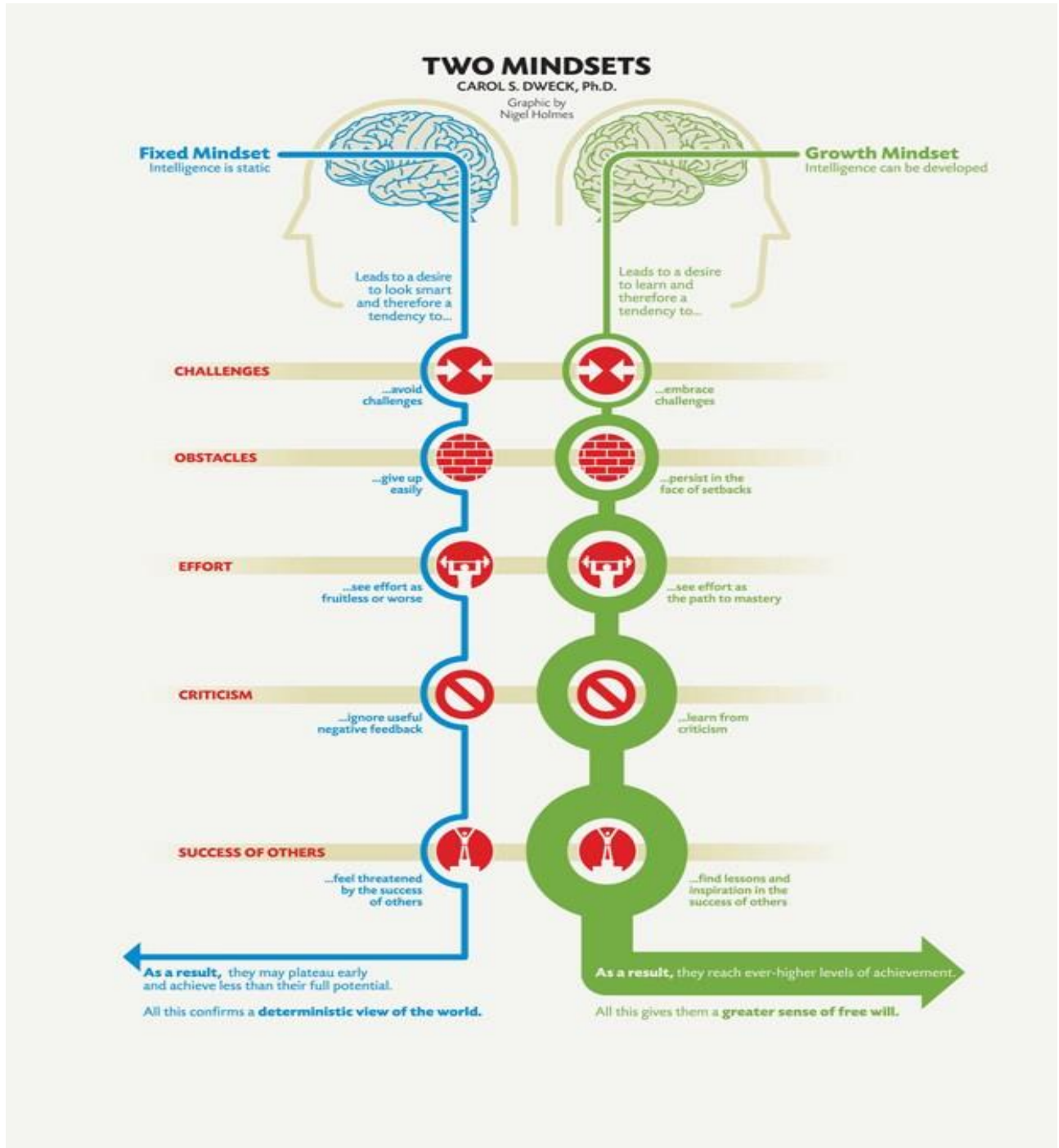


Figure 15. Two mindsets

Challenge perfectionism

Perfectionism is a personality trait characterised by a person's striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high-performance standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.

There are two types of perfectionism: adaptive and maladaptive. Adaptive perfectionism can also be called “striving for excellence”. This drive can motivate you to reach goals, providing they are realistic in the context of the resources available to you.

Maladaptive perfectionism drives people to attempt to achieve unattainable ideals, and because these are unattainable, the person internalises failure which can lead to inaction, self-criticism and at times, depression.

Set goals and plans to attain them

Develop realistic goals and consider using the BSMART method.

- **Benefits**– clarify the benefits of attaining this goal.
- **Specific**– be specific about what you want to achieve.
- **Measurable**– your goal has to be something that you can ‘see’. This could be a number, a title, a position, a location or any measurable aspect you can think of.
- **Aligned**– make sure that you align your goal to your values. If you value being fit and healthy, then your goal of being fit is aligned with your values.
- **Realistic**- once you have set your goal you need to ask yourself what you need to do in order to achieve it. You will need to consider your task list and your existing schedule and assess if it is realistic for you to undertake this goal. If the answer is yes, then do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — that enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, consider breaking big tasks into small achievable tasks that will get you closer to your goal.
- **Time Bound**– a goal is not a goal unless you set a realistic timeframe to achieving the goal. This will help you in setting your realistic plan to achieve it. You can either set your timeframe first and then align your tasks accordingly or you can write down all your steps, consider your current workload/lifestyle and adjust the time frame accordingly.

Productivity Techniques

1) The Pomodoro Technique

The Pomodoro Technique [created by Francesco Cirillo] can help you break up tasks, keep you focused and prevent procrastination.



- **Step 1: Pick a task**
 - This could be either a whole project, or else it could be a small portion of a bigger project

- **Step 2: Set a 25 minute timer**
 - Ideally use something other than your phone, however, if using your phone, put it out of arm's reach so it does not distract you!

- **Step 3: Work on your task until the time is up**
 - Work solidly on your task for this 25 minutes, avoiding distractions from your phone, email or various social media accounts

- **Step 4: Take a 5-minute break**
 - Use this time as you wish, whether to reply to emails / texts, take a short walk or grab a cup of coffee

- **Step 5: Repeat this cycle and every 4 Pomodoros, take a longer 15-30 minute break**
 - As you use this technique more, you can begin to estimate how much effort [or Pomodoros] a task will take, which can help you improve your planning

2) Eat That Frog!

Eat That Frog [created by Brian Tracy] is another productivity technique. Often, we overestimate what we can get done in a day, while underestimating what we can accomplish in a week or year. This technique helps us identify and prioritise the most important task of the day.



- **Step 1: *Identify your frog*** - your most important task of the day
 - This is your single, hardest, most important task of the day. It should ideally take no more than 4 hours to complete.
 - If your frog is going to take longer than 4 hours to complete, break it down into smaller tasks. The most important of these tasks becomes your frog of the day.
- **Step 2: *Eat that frog***
 - Do your most important task - ideally this should be done first thing in the morning to avoid procrastination.
- **Step 3: *Repeat each day***
 - Repeat this simple process each day - small tasks quickly add up to large accomplishments.

Accept that change is a part of life

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as life takes a different course. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can change and will allow you to recover quicker and re-set your goals.

Act

Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive but considered actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, greater sense of strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and heightened appreciation for life.

Develop your self-confidence

The working environment of doctors can potentially expose them to bullying and harassment, legal challenges, complaints from patients, examination failure, and any other personal failures that could potentially make you doubt yourself.

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience. Ask yourself where you might feel lacking in confidence and address this by considering your goals. Achievements and succeeding in attaining your goals can greatly enhance your confidence and self-esteem.

Keep things in perspective

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion. It might help to ask yourself, "Will I remember this in a year's time? What impact is this current situation going to have in the long term?"

Foster hope

If you notice that your brain is attracted to all the negative consequences that can potentially impact on your life, try to entertain the opposite. Consider all the positive and good things that might come your way.

An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Foster hope and trust that whatever will come your way – it will be ok.

Look after yourself

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly but try to find an exercise that you enjoy. There is little point in selecting an exercise that does not meet your needs.

Selecting an activity that both challenges you and that you look forward to, will make you more likely to stick with it. It is a great feeling to notice progress in your fitness level, flexibility and strength.

Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body strong and primed to deal with situations that require resilience.



Figure 16. Going Home Checklist

How to protect yourself at work

Guidance and advice for doctors dealing with challenging situations

Doctors can be put under extraordinary pressure at times. Most recently as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here, we share guidance and advice to help you deal with stress and anxiety during challenging periods such as this.

"This pandemic is something we did not anticipate or prepare for. The world is different now, and life in hospitals has altered almost beyond recognition. We can get through this by staying well-informed, acting on the expert recommendations, and looking out for one another, both inside and outside of work."

Professor Gaye Cunnane

RCPI Director of Health and Wellbeing



At a Glance: Advice for healthcare workers during challenging times:

1. Acknowledge how difficult this is

2. Inform yourself

3. What can you control?

When a situation is unclear, it is normal to feel anxious and to seek methods to regain a sense of control.

This table might help as a guideline:

STRESSOR	CONTROLLABLE	UNCONTROLLABLE
Important	Action skills	Coping skills
Not important	Action skills	Waste of time

Figure 17. How to address stressors

We need to understand what we can and can't control. We can control our attitudes and behaviour during challenging and difficult times and prepare as best we can for an unpredictable time. It is important to foster hope and a belief that we will get through this together

4. Have empathy

5. Take care of your physical needs

6. Filter social media exposure

7. Let your training/professional body know if your circumstances have changed

View updates on professional training and competency schemes on our [website](#).



8. Know your rights as an employee

Employers have an important role in communication with staff, providing clear policies on pay, sick leave and self-isolation. Support for the latter is vital to guarantee compliance and to prevent the unnecessary spread of infection.

Remember, **if you're sick it's not your responsibility to find a locum.**

"If you are sick and a locum is required, it is your employer/clinical director's responsibility to find one. This is clearly outlined in the [NCHD contract](#) and the [consultants contract](#)."

- Dr Lynda Sisson, Former Dean of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine and National Clinical Lead for Workplace Wellbeing for Health Service Employees

9. Tell someone if you're overwhelmed

Think of who this person might be now so that you don't have to when the time comes.

10. Know where to find health and wellbeing support

Please refer to the help and advice section for further information on available resources.

11. Remember, you can only do what is possible!

Doctors' Stories and Words of Advice

What do doctors have to say about their experience of challenging situations? Please visit our website to browse a selection of stories, observations, words of advice and tips for getting through the Covid-19 pandemic. These include messages from NCHDs, Consultants and Prof Gaye Cunnane.

If you would like to share your story, please get in touch. Email us at wellbeing@rcpi.ie.

You may also be interested in our Heritage Centre's quest to build an archive of healthcare workers' experiences of the pandemic. We want to collect this material to assist researchers in the future who are looking at this extraordinary period in history. You can read more about this [on our website](#).

Advice from Psychologists

Please visit our [website](#) to browse a selection of videos featuring psychologists, each of whom has a message for doctors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These include;

- **Ms Hadas Levy**, Chartered Counselling Psychologist and Health and Wellbeing Lead, RCPI
- **Prof Ian Robertson**, Emeritus Professor of Psychology - Advice on managing stress
- **Dr Eva Doherty**, Director of Human Factors in Patient Safety, RCSI- Responding to Patients' Distress and Strong Emotions during Covid-19
- **Dr Sara O'Byrne**, Clinical Psychologist - The psychological impact of stress on doctors during COVID19
- **Dr Claire Hayes**, Consultant Clinical Psychologist-The ABC Coping Sentence.

Do you want to speak to a Psychologist?

Prioritised access to Clinical and Counselling Psychologists for doctors and healthcare workers.

A number of Clinical and Counselling Psychologists have volunteered through the Psychological Society of Ireland to prioritise doctors and healthcare workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sessions can be conducted by phone or online.

Doctors can seek the advice of psychologists on topics related to their own mental health or advice on support on behalf of their own family members (children/partners).

Rapid access to these psychologists is for your assistance only and does not represent a recommendation.

Contact Details for Psychologists:

Visit our website to view names and contact details for Clinical and Counselling Psychologists that have volunteered through the Psychological Society of Ireland to prioritise doctors and healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. [Access this information on our website here.](#)

Key Assets Consulting offers an independent, national multidisciplinary assessment and intervention service which is available to adults, children and families.

Click here to access the
[Consultant Directory 2020](#)



You will find a number of extra resources on our website:

- BMJ: [Managing mental health challenges faced by healthcare workers during covid-19 pandemic](#)
- RCPI: [Supporting Frontline Practice in Unprecedented Times](#): Developed by Ag Eisteacht, SHEP and Dr Nicola O' Sullivan, read about a range of online interventions and support circles offered by way of support as frontline workers navigate these unprecedented waters. The service is free and is provided by experts in the area of individual and group supervision, reflective practice and emotional wellbeing.
- [Personal Protection for You](#): Support for those on the frontline of the pandemic. Developed by Professor Abbie Lane, Consultant Psychiatrist and Associate Professor at UCD, known for her holistic approach to mental health for over 20 years.



Help and Advice

Where to go for help and advice if you suffer emotional or physical ill health

As doctors, and as people, we all may suffer emotional or physical ill-health from time to time. Often, we improve on our own or through the help of friends and family. However, sometimes we need a little more assistance. We can often feel alone when this happens, but there are many different services / places you can turn for help and assistance. (Figure 17)

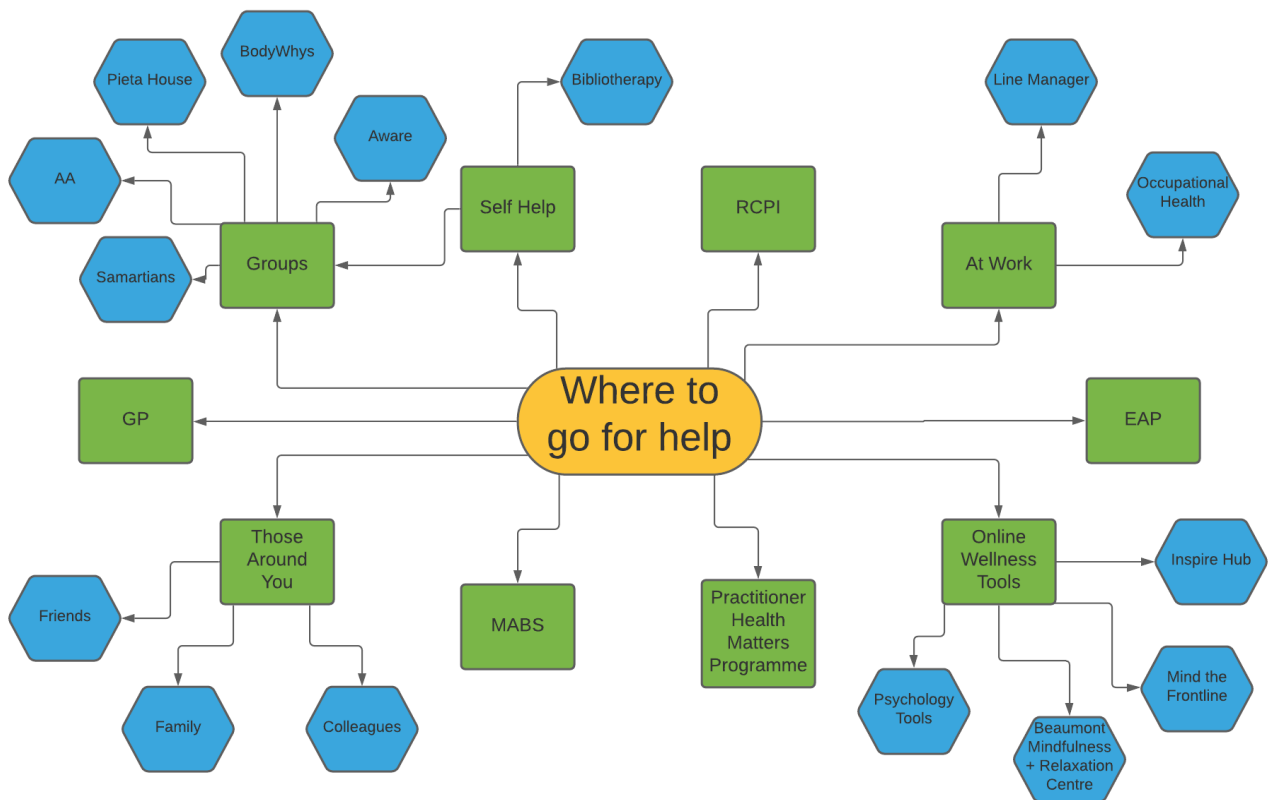


Figure 18. Where to go for help

Burnout and Supports Available: A trainee perspective



I was working in the emergency department as part of my medical BST when the Covid-19 pandemic began. What was meant to be a 3 month rotation suddenly turned into a 6 month rotation at the forefront of a new pandemic. With multiple stressors of working in a busy emergency department during a pandemic, I soon found myself burnt out and suffering a lot of work-related stress.

Initially I was very reluctant to seek help, as I did not want to be seen as 'not being able to cope' or 'not able to handle the job', and felt that if I was not in work, I would be putting others under more pressure in an already busy department. The stress was beginning to affect my life outside of work, constantly worrying about the shift I had just finished, or worrying about the shift coming up.

Eventually I realised just how much it all was affecting me and I spoke to my training consultant at work. The reaction I received was extremely supportive, and in hindsight I realise I should have raised the issues I was having a lot earlier.

My trainer put me in contact with our occupational health department, and I spoke to a member of their team that day and arranged a meeting with the occupational health consultant the following day. They also put me in touch with the EAP service, who were very accommodating and were able to arrange a counselling session for me within 2 days. I was also linked in with the RCPI health and wellbeing unit.

Through these multiple channels I was able to deal with the issues and stressors I had been dealing with, the internal turmoil of juggling stress and pressure in work in an environment I found inherently high stress, with a desire to do well and not let others down or increase anyone else's workload. What I came to realise through all of this support was that if I as a doctor did not look after myself, how could I give my patients the best care available and look after them? It can be tough to do, but sometimes we need to take a short-term step back to give ourselves some self-care so that we can long-term continue to give care to others.

Ultimately, I took a short period of time off work, and was kindly facilitated to go back to work in a different department for the rest of the rotation. Before all of this occurred to me, I did not realise just how much support is available out there for trainees, and I really would encourage people to use these services early if they feel themselves struggling as I did.

We all want to deliver the best care to our patients, and sometimes we need to put ourselves first and look after our own health in order to do that.

- **Patrick**

Find the Right General Practitioner

Register with a GP who is neither friend nor family and who will ensure that professional boundaries are maintained in all decision making.

Though you will have your own thoughts on diagnosis and appropriate interventions, bring an open mind to the consultation and just 'be a patient'.

An Irish study on GP trainees found that 57% had informally consulted a colleague regarding their health needs and 35% had referred themselves directly to a consultant, bypassing their GP. Furthermore, 92% had self-prescribed on at least one occasion. This is ill-advised as it results in a compromised level of care.

The NDTP in partnership with the ICGP launched an initiative in November 2020 for NCHDs called "A GP for every NCHD". This directorate of GPs contains GPs throughout the country who have interest and capacity to offer their services to NCHDs as patients, and are aware of the difficulties NCHDs may have finding GPs when they have to rotate through hospitals throughout the country. The directorate can be accessed through the [ICGP website](#).



The graphic features a central illustration of two stylized human figures in dark blue, holding hands and supporting a green circular platform. This platform is supported by two hands, also in dark blue, positioned below it. The background is a light green gradient with faint, overlapping text and a grid pattern. To the right of the illustration is a dark green rectangular box containing white text and logos.

National GP Directory for NCHDs, Trainees and Interns

The National GP Directory, compiled by the ICGP, lists GPs who have indicated that they have capacity to register NCHDs, trainees and interns seeking a GP within their locality during their clinical rotations.

- Self-care is important for all doctors
- Self-treatment is not compatible with good self-care
- Accessing GP care in a timely manner supports good health outcomes

The GP Directory makes accessing primary care easier, considering the rotational nature of training for doctors.

 | 

Figure 18. National GP Directory

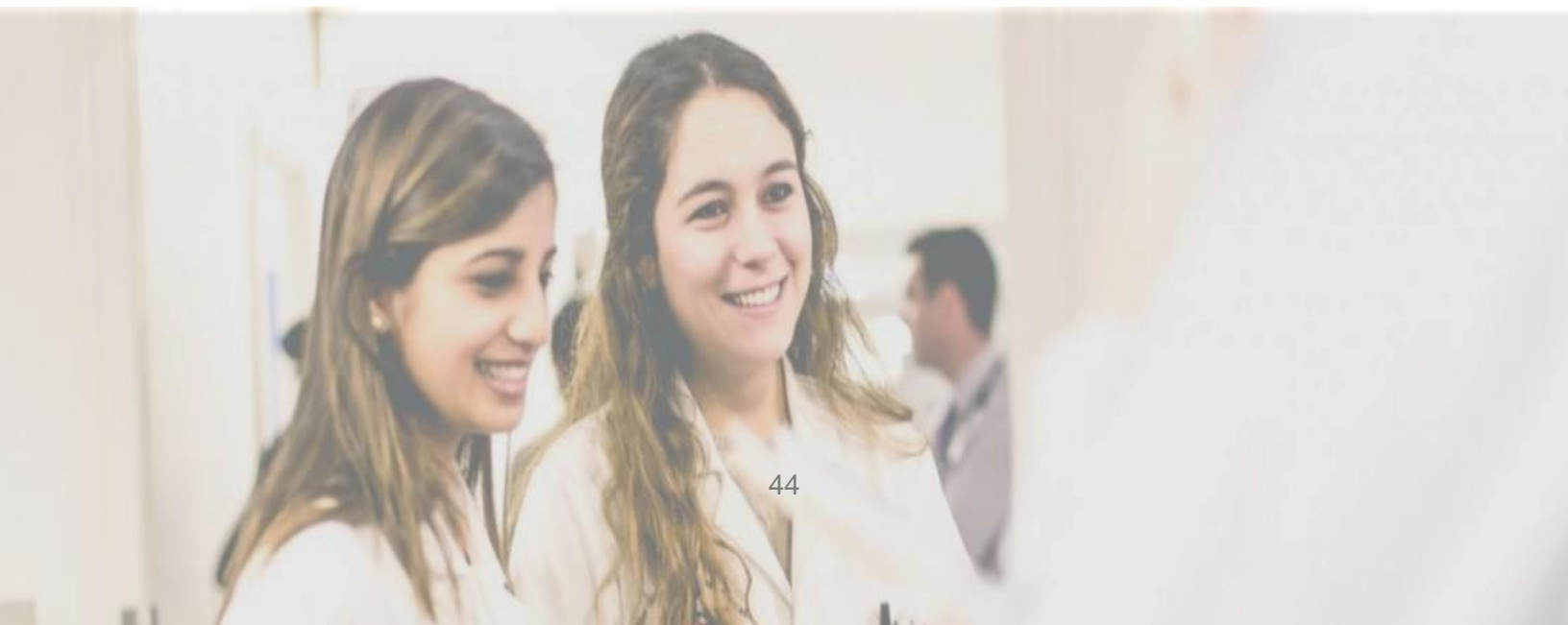
It is easy to put this off when you are feeling well, and have no health concerns, however, having a GP already set up for when you are unwell can make a huge difference and relieve a lot of pressure.

Occupational Health

All public hospital employees in Ireland now have access to occupational health services. They are based on site in the larger hospitals or accessible off-site in some areas. Each is clinically led by a specialist / consultant occupational physician who provides a service with a team of nurses and administrative staff. All work closely with physiotherapists who can 'fast-track' access to treatment for musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and also have access, directly or indirectly, to counselling support services, which may or may not be on site.

Occupational health deals with the interface between health and work but encompasses a broader remit of work and work environment (including psychosocial environment), health and ill-health as well as life and lifestyle.

A very strict code of ethics underpins occupational health practice, augmenting the Medical Council's Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics (8th Edition). Occupational health professionals are mindful of the importance of respecting confidentiality. They have particular skills in communicating effectively with employers and managers on fitness to work issues without disclosing confidential health details.



Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Programme is a work-place support service for all hospital staff. The service is **free** and available to all hospital employees. It is a confidential independent service. It supports employees with psychosocial issues (psychological and social factors that influence mental health) These issues may be personal or work-related, affecting your job performance or home life.

The EAP gives you access to trained, experienced counsellors who will help you to develop coping strategies in a non-judgemental confidential environment. EAP counselling is normally a short-term service. You will initially be offered up to 6 sessions however this can be extended on a case-by-case basis.

Access to the Service

There are a number of ways to be referred to the EAP: via your line manager, occupational health or you can self-refer yourself. You can find the referral form on the hse website (link below).

You can call **0818327327** to speak to someone who can help or visit [online](#).

A Confidential Service

EAP counselling is a confidential service. No information about your issue will be given to anyone without your consent, which includes your employer. Some people worry that attending EAP will 'go on their permanent record' and be available for all future employers to see, however, this is not the case. Confidentiality is strictly maintained, **except** where:

- The client, other employees, or the public are at serious risk
- A criminal offence is committed
- Ordered to disclose by a court of law
- There is a child protection concern.

A wide range of issues are dealt with by EAP, including:

- Stress at work
- Difficult relationships in work (including bullying)
- Traumatic events (e.g. assault, suicide)

- Addictions
- Personal issues outside of work (e.g. bereavement, relationships).

The service provides, on a confidential basis:

- Counselling
- Consultation to managers on staff wellbeing and psychological issues
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Response – individual and group support and pre-incident training
- Workshops on staff wellbeing issues.

HSE Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit

The HSE Workplace Health and Wellbeing unit offers a range of support services and programmes specifically tailored for healthcare staff to help support you physically and emotionally throughout your working life.

The site acts as a central hub for information regarding services and programmes available to staff. These include:

- Emotional Wellbeing Services
- Physical Wellbeing Services
- Workplace Rehabilitation Services
- Health Promotion and Improvement
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Occupational Health
- National Health and Safety Function



The site can be accessed [here](#) or you can contact their Helpdesk on **1850 444 925**.

RCPI Physician Wellbeing Programme

The department provides support and referral pathways for trainees who are struggling to meet the training requirements or reach the competencies required for reasons related to their health or overall performance.

The Health and Wellbeing Department has multiple resources online on the RCPI website regarding:

- Mental Wellbeing
- Physical Wellbeing
- Building Resilience
- Where to go for help and advice
- Current health and wellbeing initiatives being run by the RCPI
- Publications.

The department is happy to hear from all trainees, and trainees can self-refer to look for help / advice by emailing wellbeing@rcpi.ie

Access to the online information is via the dedicated pages on the [RCPI website](#).



Practitioner Health Matters Programme

Any doctor, dentist or pharmacist who has a concern about a mental health or a substance misuse problem can receive confidential help from experts at the Practitioner Health Matters Programme. It operates on a not-for-profit basis and is funded primarily by voluntary contributions and professional associations. Cases will be handled on a strictly confidential basis. The service is free of charge at the point of care to all practitioners.

Contact details:

Tel: (01) 278 9369

Mob: 085 760 1274

Email: confidential@practitionerhealth.ie

PractitionerHealth
LOOKING AFTER YOUR WELLBEING IN CONFIDENCE

For more information visit their [website](#).

Bibliotherapy and Self Help

The use of books for therapeutic purposes is known as bibliotherapy. Self-help books have been used in this way for many years and are now being recommended as a means of providing psychological therapy for people experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties. The effectiveness of bibliotherapy has been well established in clinical trials.

Bibliotherapy has been recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) UK as a useful start in treating mild and moderate depression, anxiety and some other mental health problems.

Self Help Groups

Aware provides free support, education and information services for people impacted by depression and bipolar disorder, as well as their loved ones. They offer support and self-care groups which are led by Aware volunteer facilitators.

Website www.aware.ie

Tel: 1800 80 48 48 (available Mon – Sun 10am-10pm)

Email: supportmail@aware.ie



Alcoholics Anonymous is an international organisation dedicated to providing support to individuals and families affected by alcohol misuse. It is an anonymous, confidential organisation which aims to support others to achieve and maintain sobriety. There are meetings located all around the country and information on these can be found on their website.

Website: www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie

Tel: 01 842 0700

Email: gso@alcoholicsanonymous.ie



Bodywhys is the national support group for people affected by eating disorders. It provides information on eating disorders, information regarding treatment and support services for both individuals and their families.

Website: www.bodywhys.ie

Tel: 01 210 7906

Email: alex@bodywhys.ie



Pieta house provides support and free counselling to those who are contemplating suicide, those engaging in self-harm, and those bereaved by suicide. They offer a free 24 hour phone service and have centres located throughout the country. For information regarding your nearest centre see the website.

Website: www.pieta.ie

Tel: Freephone 1800 247 247 to speak to a therapist if you are in crisis

Text HELP to 51444 if you are in crisis

Call 0818 111 126 to make an appointment with a therapist

Email: info@pieta.ie



The Samaritans provide support to people who are emotionally distressed. They provide a 24 hour free phone service where you can talk to someone one-on-one. Other ways to get in touch include via email or by writing a letter. They also have a self-help app available via the website which contains a mood tracker as well as a range of techniques to help you challenge and cope with difficult feelings.

Website: www.samaritans.org/ireland/

Tel: 116 123 Email: jo@samaritans.ie



Online Wellbeing Tools

Beaumont Hospital's Mindfulness and Relaxation Centre has information and audio guides on various relaxation and mindful techniques. These can be accessed online and also downloaded to your device. Visit them online [here](#).

The **Inspire Hub** has a host of online resources, and access is available to all HSE staff. Resources include online self-help tools, information resources – both written and videos, an online mood tracker as well as guided self-assessments and a helpline. It can be used on its own or while waiting for an appointment with a counsellor via EAP. Instructions on how to sign up to the hub can be found on the [HSE Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit page](#).



Mind the Frontline is an online mental health resource of all healthcare workers set up during the Covid-19 pandemic for all those who were concerned about the impact it was having on their mental health. It contains information on managing in crisis, self-care, anxiety management, coping with death and professional support. It can be accessed [here](#).

PsychologyTools have put together a number of resources from various sources regarding healthcare worker wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as creating their own resource on 'Living with worry and anxiety amidst global uncertainty':

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources](#)
- [Free Guide To Living With Worry And Anxiety Amidst Global Uncertainty](#).

The **RCPI Physician Wellbeing** pages are regularly updated and contain advice on a physician wellbeing. You'll also find additional information links / resources for physicians all of which are available [here](#).

Other helpful resources

[FrontlineMind.com](#)

[Learn4MentalHealth.com](#)

[Support the Workers](#)

[The FACE COVID Model from Dr Russ Harris](#)

[Guidance from HSE Psychology UCC](#)

[Intensive Care Society UK wellbeing resources](#)

[US CDC: Advice on managing stress and anxiety](#)

[Psychology Tools: Resources for Conoronavirus](#)

[BST Survival Guide from the Royal College of](#)

[Physicians of Ireland](#)

Money Advice & Budgeting Service

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) is the State's money advice service, guiding people through dealing with problem debt for more than twenty-five years. It is free, confidential and independent.

MABS deal with people who have problem debt or feel like their debts are in danger of becoming a problem. They deal with a wide range of personal debts from personal loans and credit card debts to mortgage arrears. They look at each client's situation as a whole and seek to find solutions that provide the best possible outcome for the client.

They have a dedicated service, Abhaile, to help homeowners find resolutions to their home mortgage arrears. The aim of Abhaile is to help mortgage holders in arrears to find the best solutions and keep them wherever possible, in their own homes.

They have a website with many valuable resources including online assessment and budgeting tools – www.mabs.ie

MABS have over 60+ offices around Ireland which operate on an appointment system. They can be contacted by phone, email and live chat.

You can access their live chat function via the website. Phone lines are in operation Monday – Friday, 9am to 8pm. Tel: **0761 07 2000**. You can request a callback via their website or alternatively can email them at **helpline@mabs.ie**.



Income Protection Insurance

Income protection can be an invaluable source of security of income, that we may realise we need only when it is too late.

We are used to earning a certain income for our work. An income protection acts as a security net, that if we are to become unwell and are unable to work, we will still get that income. You can choose to insure for different amounts and can adjust it yearly to be in line with your pay increases as you progress your training.

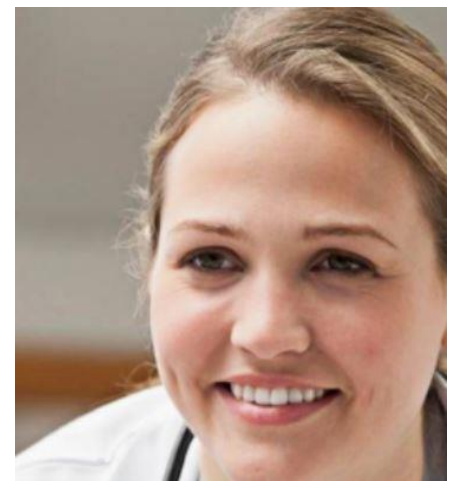
When we are unwell, we do not need another source of stress on us of having enough money to pay bills, mortgages, loans, healthcare bills etc., and income protection can help alleviate this stress.

It can be obtained from most insurance companies, and we recommend you look for the policy that is right for you.

Well Able Initiative

Training as a specialist can be very challenging. It can be even more challenging for doctors with chronic illness and/or disability; be it physical, mental or learning disability. Doctors with chronic illness and/or disability can face additional challenges such as accessibility issues, fatigue-related issues, necessary absence concerns due to multiple medical appointments or simply the stigma associated with having a chronic illness/disability.

Working alongside our doctors, we want to start a conversation about these challenges, and identify and advocate for their needs, and together, we have established the Well Able initiative. To spark discussion and to give an insight into some of the challenges faced, two of our trainee doctors have kindly shared their own experiences which you can read on our website.



If you would like to share your own experience, thoughts or simply be part of the conversation, please get in touch via email.

For more information, visit: www.wellabledocs.ie; a dedicated website set up by a group of doctors working in Ireland who want to start a conversation about doctors with chronic illness and/or disabilities.

RCPI Reasonable Adjustment Policy

In April 2020, we published our Reasonable Adjustment Policy which aims to support the rights of a trainee with a disability to participate in training in a work environment that is accessible, inclusive and free from discrimination and harassment, and outline the processes involved in seeking reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

> [Download the Reasonable Adjustment \(Disability\) Policy here.](#)

Supporting Doctors as Parents

The members of the RCPI Physician Health and Wellbeing Trainee Committee (which is led by Trainee doctors), would like to improve the experiences of doctors who are parents.

They have set up regular coffee mornings to offer a chance to chat to other doctors who are also juggling the demands of parenthood with postgraduate specialist training. Keep an eye on the RCPI events page for more!

You can get involved by joining the [Docs as Parents Network Ireland](#) Facebook Page.

Self-Referral Algorithm

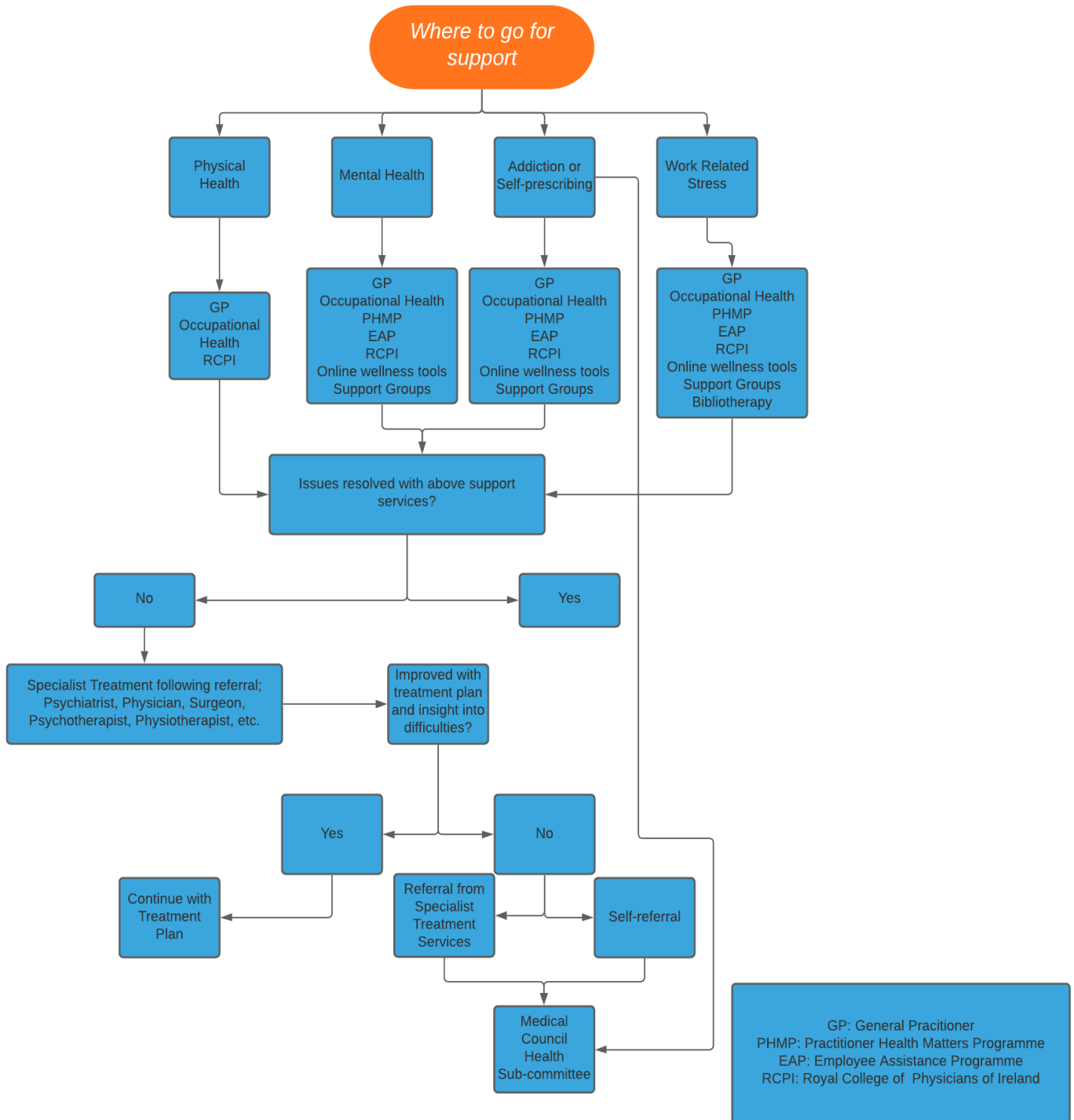


Figure 19. Self-Referral Algorithm



Royal College of Physicians of Ireland
Frederick House, 19 South Frederick Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
Telephone: (01) 863 9700
Registered Charity Number 20002718
www.rcpi.ie