

Wellbeing is everything

I was browsing the Health Service Journal this week, and there is an article about the Care Quality Commission rolling out training for their inspectors on delivering difficult news, having supportive conversations, and identifying signs of distress. (ref: Townsend, E. *CQC to train staff in 'relaying distressing news', following headteacher's death*. HSJ online 8 February 2024). This follows a coroner ruling that an Ofsted inspection contributed to the death of a teacher.

This made me think again about how pressured many of our colleagues are feeling right now with the current increased scrutiny of audiology services. To be frank, I believe that it is quite right that we are expected to provide evidence of the quality of our services, to be accountable and open to improving constantly. But I do recognise that this has come as a challenge for some who haven't been expected to do this previously, and that the uninvited and sometimes negative feedback comes as a shock. Furthermore, some heads of service have then been expected to fix some serious issues with little outside support and no extra resources.

So there is little wonder that many of our colleagues are experiencing frustration or emotional distress.

However, we know that while the main focus of healthcare professionals is on the well-being of their patients, it is important for audiologists to prioritize their own well-being as well.

So whilst some of you may regard BAA as just another voice constantly asking you all to engage with quality assurance, improvements, CPD, do more, etc- we are also very aware of our members wellbeing and we are constantly asking for more support for our profession from NHS leadership and others.

In fact NHS leadership has recognised the effect of recent review findings and improvement programmes on the wellbeing of our profession across the UK, and we hoped that would mean some urgent support packages for colleagues affected by the issues, but there has been variation in what has been provided locally.

At BAA we have tried to provide what support we can given our limited capacity, and much of our time gone into supporting with practical tools and advice and guidance for audiology practice itself- such as our newly launched QIT tool which gives concrete examples and templates for the service improvements that will be invaluable for many.

But we also decided to run a course of supportive workshops for colleagues who may need these most urgently at the moment- those from services identified as "Incident sites" in the NHS England Paediatric audiology programme. These will be externally-led, closed workshops; we won't be attending, and what is discussed will not be shared with us or anyone else. But we do hope that our facilitator will be able to share some of the things that colleagues find helpful, to inform what support could be offered in the future.

For the rest of you, I urge you to reflect on how you are feeling and seek out support if you need it. Both within the NHS and private provision, employers have a duty of care to their employees and most will have something to offer in the way of wellbeing support should you ask for it. Within the NHS, it may be useful to

reach out to regional healthcare science leadership who are there to support the healthcare science workshop, particularly if it is related to the current systemic issues.

I have myself felt the pressure from my various roles and at times felt overwhelmed over the last year or so. But there is great support to be had from colleagues and peers, so please do just reach out to your immediate colleagues, and wider networks to support each other. We really are all in this together, and I have been really heartened by how many people have been willing to step up and support their peers.

I have also tried to become better at recognising when I need to just take time out to look after my own wellbeing. Please do remember to reflect on how you are feeling from time to time and put things in place to look after yourself as much as possible. We cannot afford to lose any of the audiology workforce, so taking time now to protect yourself against burn out will ultimately help others.

Sometimes what's needed is just forgetting about audiology and making a little time to do things that give you joy. So today's homework is to identify some things that bring you joy- however small- and do at least one of those things every day. So far for me this week, that has included catching up with friends over a pint, making an unidentifiable object in pottery class, and occasionally just getting up from my desk at home and dancing to a whole song whilst my dog watches on bemused.

Take care of yourselves,
Sam