

Embargoed: not for publication or broadcast, including online, until 0001hrs Tuesday 27 July 2021

Doctors' burnout worsens as GMC report reveals pandemic impact

The COVID-19 pandemic increased burnout among doctors and risks reversing recent improvements in their workloads and wellbeing, the General Medical Council (GMC) warns in a report published today (27 July 2021).

The regulator's annual national training survey was completed by more than 63,000 UK doctors, all of them either trainees or trainers. Responses to questions about burnout were the worst since they were introduced in 2018.

A third of trainees said they felt burnt out to a high or very degree because of their work, compared to around a quarter in previous years. Three in five said they always or often felt worn out at the end of a working day, and 44% felt their work was 'emotionally exhausting' to a high or very high degree.

Trainees' responses to seven wellbeing-related questions, across all medical specialties, saw a swing towards negative answers compared to previous years.

Charlie Massey, Chief Executive of the GMC, said:

'It is not surprising that burnout has worsened during the pandemic, but we cannot expect doctors to continue to operate at this level of intensity. As health services emerge from COVID pressures will remain, but we must not risk reversing the gains that have been made in recent years.

'The danger is that, unless action is taken, workloads and wellbeing will continue to suffer, and future burnout rates could get even worse. As we move on from the pandemic, it is vital that doctors' training and wellbeing needs are central to service recovery plans. This year's results should be a blip caused by COVID, not part of a new normal.'

Although trainees and trainers reported worsening levels of burnout, the quality of training remained high, and similar to pre-pandemic levels. Around three-quarters (76%) of trainees rated the quality of teaching as 'good' or 'very good', and almost nine in ten (88%) described their clinical supervision as 'good' or 'very good'.

Eight in ten (81%) of trainees said they were on course to meet their curriculum outcomes for the year, although one in ten – a substantial number in real terms – were concerned about progressing through their training.

Mr Massey added:

'The pandemic has caused inevitable disruption, and some training opportunities have been lost. But, thanks to the efforts and hard work of trainers and trainees, where training has been possible the quality has been sustained.

'We know many trainees remain concerned about their training progression, so we are working hard to ensure training is flexible, fair, and helps prepare doctors to meet current and future patient needs.'

The *national training survey 2021: summary report* is available online.

Ends

Notes to editors

The GMC Press Office can be contacted on 020 7189 5454, or email press@gmc-uk.org

The General Medical Council (GMC) works to protect the public by setting, upholding and raising the standards of medical education and practice across the UK.

It does this by:

- Setting the standards doctors must follow, making sure they continue to meet these standards throughout their careers.
- Deciding which doctors are qualified to work here, and overseeing UK medical education and training.
- Taking action if a doctor is putting the safety of patients, or the public's confidence in doctors, at risk.

It is in the public interest to have healthcare systems in the UK, both public and private, where doctors practise to the highest ethical and professional standards to provide the best possible, safe medical care.

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