

The thin line between Burnout and Depression

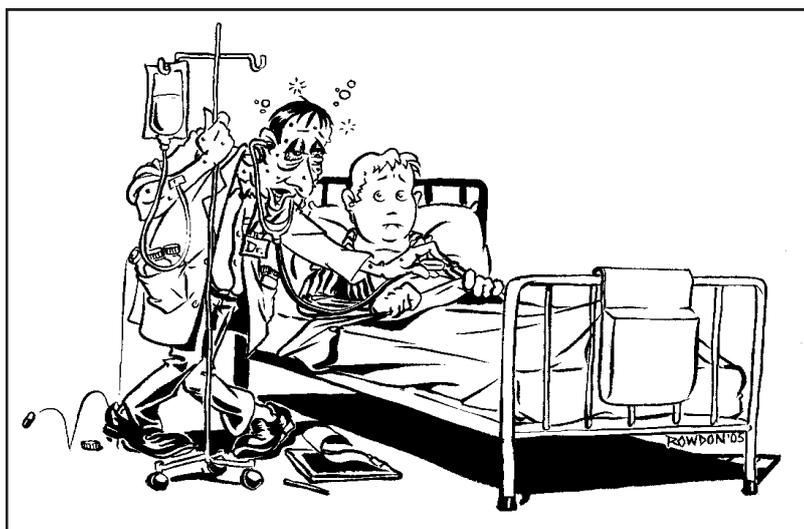
How many times have you felt like the doctor in the cartoon below? How tempting has it been to ask the patient to swap places, just for a while, in order to have a much needed rest? (This picture has appeared in several past editions of the VDHP newsletter.)

If you're feeling tired; exhausted; run down or disillusioned, it's easy to relate it all back to work. Feeling pressured and unappreciated, the hours are long and you're dealing with tough stuff: positive outcomes, grateful patients and even a simple "thank you" are memories from the distant past.

Then there's that feeling of being "just worn out" and not able to give any more: perhaps a break, a good holiday, a change of scene, a chance to relax and everything will be OK...

There's the sleep disturbance: lying awake worrying about patients; paying bills and the increasing agitation.

Inevitably there's the question of whether medicine was ever the right career choice. Mix this with a few challenging life events such as moving house; a birth or death of a loved one or the end of a relationship...



You're feeling irritable: have a tendency to snap at others – everything's too much, whether work related or not.

Now you can't remember when anything was fun and when it was easy to have a good laugh.

Progress to a sense of hopelessness: there's no point in medicine; life itself is losing meaning and by the time there is a feeling that things are never going to be any better and there is no future, **Burn Out** has seamlessly transformed into **Depression**.

So even if you think it's "just burnout" – talk to someone independent: someone at VDHP, your GP or a psychologist. Get some help to sort it all out. And even if you may have crossed that thin line into depression, remember it's a treatable condition and help is available in the form of psychotherapy and/or medication.

It's OK to take some steps to bring some colour back into your life.

Dr Kym Jenkins

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THE PREVALENCE, PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS OF DOCTORS WITH CHRONIC ILLNESSES

WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU

Very soon, you should receive a survey asking about your experience of long term illnesses.

Even if the questions do not seem relevant to you, your response matters to our research.

Please complete and return the survey in the envelope provided.

VDHP and Substance Use Disorders

As the celebrations and summer holidays come to an end, some of us may have experienced stress; loneliness; burnout; exacerbation of mental health issues; alteration of work requirements or changes in alcohol (and possibly drug) consumption.

I am a doctor who has attended VDHP for some time, with the problem of substance abuse. From the outset I have adopted the requirements of the Program.

The process of recovery initially requires the recognition (self or by others) of the problem.

The next (big) step is to seek assistance. (I promise you that no one will think any less of you for doing this.) Following this, assessment is undertaken. This requires honesty and the real wish to recover. The appointment of a GP, necessary Specialists and entry into the VDHP Case management, Aftercare and Monitoring Program (CAMP) agreement commence the recovery treatment. VDHP has a range of support services and provides excellent ongoing assessment and if necessary, advocacy.

Initially, many are frightened that exposure, de-registration, loss of employment or recurrence of the illness (relapse) may ensue. While no guarantees are given, these outcomes are unlikely with treatment and monitoring; most participants maintain or resume their employment.

The treatment and monitoring processes are not usually overly arduous nor invasive into one's life. Compliance also serves to protect the participant. With a combination of assistance, adherence to the processes and time, the prognosis for recovery is excellent.

I urge any of you who feel they may require assistance, including those who find themselves in an acute situation, to contact VDHP (they freely offer their service). Your future, the wellbeing of those around you and your patients will be the beneficiaries of your action.

Dr Anon.



Caduceus: Doctors Supporting Doctors

Caduceus is a support group that was set up for doctors and medical students who have, or have had, substance use disorders. It meets once a week at a venue known only to the participants and facilitators. Numbers fluctuate, but there are up to twelve attendees each week. The group is confidential.

As well as general support and a chance to learn from others who have had similar problems, participants benefit from the chance to deal with the specific challenges of addressing an addiction while a member of the medical profession. Caduceus is not a 12 step program, however, many of our participants also go to Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous.

VDHP sees Caduceus as an integral part of our case management and monitoring program. However, many participants, valuing the ongoing support, continue to attend Caduceus long after their case management has finished.

Access to Caduceus is via recommendation from VDHP, so if you have or have had any substance use problems and feel you may benefit from Caduceus, do give us a call. You're also welcome to come in and discuss how Caduceus may be of benefit to you. Of course, if you would like any other help for substance use disorders, please contact VDHP anyway.

Dr Kym Jenkins & Cheryl Wile

The Challenges of Being a Medical Student

Medical students face challenges from many directions, not just from their medical course.

The normal developmental 'tasks' of adolescence, combined with an intense prolonged university program, make student years complex and challenging.

Trying out relationships; learning to understand and negotiate these; finding out what type of relationship you want and what kind of person suits you: this can be hard enough in itself, without the competing demands of study and course requirements.



Establishing independence from parents can be difficult when they may still be needed for financial assistance and accommodation. Developing an idea of one's individuality and one's own ways of living while still living in the family home with its established ways of doing things – how do you negotiate this? This situation is particularly prolonged for graduate-entry students who have already completed an undergraduate course and may not start working until their late 20s.

This is also a time of developing a sense of personal identity and values, who you are and what's important to you. At the same time, you are joining a profession that has very clear values, ethics and a strong 'identity' of its own. How do these match up? For many they fit together well, but others may find contradictions. How do you manage these?

Commencement of clinical placements is a time when students see more clearly what medicine is and what the profession they have chosen actually looks like. For many this is exciting and affirming, yet for others it can be stressful and difficult, raising questions or doubts about the career choice that they have made.

This all makes for much confusion and stress, and it is important to know that support is readily available and that there is the opportunity to think things through and clarify direction.

Dr Sandy Youren



Have you seen our new website? There are links to services, publications, research articles, case studies, newsletters and more. Check it out at www.vdhp.org.au

VDHP welcomes Ms Shaan Lewis, Dr Jan Steel & Ms Sharon Summers



Ms Lewis joined VDHP as the new Office Manager in late October 2010. Her background is primarily in not-for-profit administration and customer service, with brief forays into Community Theatre and the Australian Army. She has a passion for working in organisations that actively educate and provide support to the community.



Dr Jan Steel started at VDHP at the beginning of 2011. She has a background in psycho-geriatrics and private general adult psychiatry and has experience in treating doctors in that setting. Personally and professionally she has a strong belief that healthy doctors help build strong communities. Working at VDHP is one way to contribute to that.

Ms Summers joined VDHP in March 2011 and has worked as a counsellor/psychotherapist for 20 years, with particular experience in addictions, grief and loss, interpersonal and Jungian-oriented psychotherapy. She enjoys classical music and philosophy.



Surviving and thriving in the health workforce

The Health of the Health Professional – major focus of 2011 Conference

The next conference of the Australasian Doctors' Health Network, in partnership with the Goodfellow Unit, University of Auckland, will be held in Auckland, New Zealand from 3-5 November.

Sustaining the health of health professionals is critical for maintaining the capacity of our health workforce. We are well aware of the issues faced with an over-reliance on overseas trained health professionals, an ageing workforce, and the increasing complexity of health care roles.

Conference purpose This international conference represents the first serious effort to address the critical issue of sustaining the health of health professionals. The conference has been opened up to a wider group of health professionals to tackle this challenge head on and produce a position statement that address the key issues that lie at the heart of our health as health professionals.

Key audiences We invite medical and allied health professionals to engage in and reflect on the urgent challenges to our personal health. This includes: doctors, nurses, midwives, medical students, allied health professionals, health researchers, unions, employers, government and others.

Programme An extensive 3 day program is under development with a number of keynote speakers confirmed. The conference program includes professional streams with plenty of opportunities for networking and shared insights. Keynote speakers include:

Neill Piland - *The Economic Impact of Ill Health in the Healthcare Workforce*

Lester Levy - *Dysfunctional workplaces*

Erica Franks – *Why should we be healthy?*

Rob Moodie – *topic tbc*

Location Auckland, New Zealand offers a tremendous variety of outdoor activities with its temperate climate and easy access to the Hauraki Gulf islands. It consistently ranks highly as a preferred lifestyle location. The conference program will be complemented by a social program that showcases the best that Auckland has to offer for delegates, accompanying partners and families.

Summary information

Theme: *Surviving and thriving in the health workforce*

Dates: Thursday 3 November – Saturday 5 November 2011

Venue: The Langham Hotel, Auckland

Website: www.hohp.org.nz

VDHP farewells Ms Ali Glen & Dr Amanda Young



Ms Glen commenced as Office Manager in 2009. Her input into streamlining many of the administrative procedures was greatly valued by the organisation and her smiling face and bubbly personality will be missed by the staff and participants alike. Ms Glen leaves to join her partner in New Zealand and we wish her all the best in her future career.

VDHP thanks Dr Young for her contribution during her time here and wishes her well in her future career.