

## Beds & Herts LMC Ltd: Weekly Update for Practices, Wednesday 04<sup>th</sup> January 2023

### SPECIAL EDITION



### Happy New Year!

A month ago, we decided our first newsletter of the New Year would be devoted to wellbeing. Since then, NHS pressures have escalated at an alarming rate. It is becoming increasingly unlikely that a great 'rescue' for General Practice is on the horizon for the coming year, which leaves us needing to prioritise ourselves so that we can be there for our patients.

This year we will be looking to develop communications to support staff and patients in their understanding of the pressures we face – the first of which is included today. We will, of course, continue to provide support via our Pastoral care service and newsletter updates.

In this Special Edition, we have provided two different perspectives on the current situation, to articulate how this may be viewed and tackled. The first is through the reimagining of a classic fairy tale and the second through analysis of Hellenistic philosophy.

We would like to suggest New Year Resolutions for all Herts and Beds Practices:

- Make your personal, staff and colleagues' wellbeing a priority – without staff there is no service to patients.
- Focus on provision of safe patient services as a primary aim – implement the BMA safe working guidance. [Safe working in general practice \(bma.org.uk\)](https://www.bma.org.uk)

### A tale of the three little GPs

Once upon a time, there were 3 little GPs. These little GPs each had a vision of providing safe, effective clinical care to all their patients. They were loved (this is a fairy tale after all!) and enthusiastically set out to build their Practices.

The first little GP finds a bundle of straw to construct a practice. The GP quietly hones the skills of general practice, and starts providing individual and excellent care to the local population.

Then 'Covid' knocks at the door, and demands to come in. The brave little GP is bewildered but resolute, and faces the huffs and the puffs.

"No! No! No! and my LMC support me with this position!!" says the brave GP.

But the knocking and puffing continues with PCN groupings, vaccination hubs, remote working, shielding and the social distancing. Eventually it's too much and the Practice falls down!

The second of the three little GPs finds a bundle of sticks and also decides to build a Practice. This Practice starts planning and providing the type of excellent care this little GP knew was needed for their local population. However, 'Post Covid' knocks on the door wanting to come in.

"No! No! No! and my LMC support me with this position!!" retorts the brave little GP.

But the little GP soon begins to feel exhausted and shell-shocked. The knocking and puffing continue with increasing patient demand, increasing targets for funding, increasing NHS unrest with strike action, and increasing staff moral injury. The brave little GP looks about for support but finds none. Eventually it's all too much and the Practice falls down!

Now, the final of the three little GPs locates a pile of bricks and had the same idea.

This 3rd little GP has looked around and has learnt some difficult lessons. Each brick placed into the practice, strengthens their resolve. Each brick contains a firm **NO**, protecting the 3<sup>rd</sup> little GP's core purpose of good clinical care to those in need. The '**New Normal**' in General Practice knocks on the door wanting to come in.

"No! No! No! and my LMC support me with this position!!" shouts the brave GP.

But the knocking and puffing continues with contract hand backs, GP burnout, shifting of responsibilities, increased public anger, and explosions of health inequalities.

The knocking, huffing, and puffing is relentless, but the clever third little GP saw this coming and felt confident to say **NO**.

The brick practice enabled the implementation of BMA safe working limits, unresourced work being declined, pushback on the shift of secondary care work and "**NO**" becoming a part of the Practice vocabulary.

The knocking, huffing, and puffing escalates, but the third little GP continues to prioritise personal and staff wellbeing, thus ensuring safe effective patient care can continue from the well-insulated premises. They remain resolute that the storm can be ridden.

**The three little GPs is a tale showing you that you can continue to provide safe patient care, that is in your control. You are surrounded by hurricanes and system collapse, and it is necessary to protect yourselves, to ensure ongoing protection for your patients.**

## **What did the Romans Ever Do for Us?**

### **5 Happiness lessons from the Stoic Philosophers**

Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy that was founded in Athens around 300 BC. Despite being over two thousand years old, many of the principles that underpinned stoicism are still relevant.

The philosophy teaches the importance of self-awareness and self-control in navigating life's challenges and can provide a useful perspective when considering our own wellbeing.

### **Control what you can, accept what you can't**

One of the overriding principles of stoic philosophy is the understanding of control. Modern life is so chaotic that we often lose perspective as to what remains within our control and what sits outside it. We invest huge amounts of energy trying to foresee and understand the decisions of organisations such as the government or NHSE, however most of us have little chance of influencing this. Epictetus said:

*“The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters so that I can say clearly to myself which are externals not under my control, and which have to do with the choices I actually control.”*

Once we identify that which we can control, we can focus our attention on affecting the outcome we desire, rather than worrying about external events. Seneca wrote:

*“You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength.”*

### **Detach events from your emotional reaction**

In any situation, there are two elements that govern how we react. The first is the event itself, and the second is how we choose to interpret those events and respond. The stoics believed that there was always a choice in the second element, but that we rarely take the time to step back and consider our personal interpretation of the event. Marcus Aurelius said:

*“If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.”*

By taking a moment to differentiate in our minds what actually happened from our interpretation of the event, we can often save ourselves from an emotionally charged response, and the stress that usually accompanies it.

### **Putting life in perspective**

The stoics believed that one of the key pillars of happiness was the practice of gratitude. When life feels tough it is easy to lose perspective about what we have in our lives that so many others don't. Epictetus said:

*“He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.”*

### **Don't worry about what others think of you**

Marcus Aurelius wrote extensively about the management of criticism from others. While history remembers him as a great leader, in his time he was not immune to criticism of his decisions both in battle and in the senate. Currently those in general practice seem to be an easy target for patients, politicians, the media and other healthcare leaders. Aurelius believed that by letting the criticism of others affect us, we do ourselves a disservice.

*“When another blames you or hates you, or people voice similar criticisms, go to their souls, penetrate inside and see what sort of people they are. You will realize that there is no need to be racked with anxiety that they should hold any particular opinion about you.”*

Instead, he felt that the only opinion that truly matters was one's opinion of oneself.

*“I have often wondered how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, but yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others.”*

### Ask for help

There are very few people working in the healthcare system that do not feel the pressures of the current situation. However, while we have seen an increase in the use of our pastoral care service, and referrals to the practitioner health programme, we know that many in general practice continue to suffer in silence, not wanting to ask for help for fear of being seen as weak or inferior. Marcus Aurelius wrote:

*“Don’t be ashamed of needing help. You have a duty to fulfil, just like a soldier on the wall of battle. So, what if you are injured and can’t climb up without another soldier’s help?”*

### Sources

- Meditations – by Marcus Aurelius
- The Obstacle Is The Way – by Ryan Holiday
- Letters from a Stoic – by Seneca

### ‘It’s OK to’

During the pandemic Google created a “It’s OK to” document, aimed at helping its staff navigate the difficult circumstances brought about by home working, lockdowns, and the general anxiety we all felt during the pandemic. Inspired by Google, many other organisations started creating their own “It’s OK to” documents. Below is our adaptation of the idea inspired by many of the conversations we have had with GPs over the last few months.

Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire  
Local Medical Committee Ltd

**It's OK.**

- .....to not check your e-mail, bloods, tasks outside of working hours
- .....to put your family before your work
- .....to not know everything
- .....to say “no”
- .....to say “I don’t know”
- .....to have a cry
- .....to take 10 minutes for a cup of coffee and a snack
- .....to have a day off
- .....to have an off day
- .....to have a great day when others around you are having a terrible day
- .....to talk about it
- .....to not talk about it
- .....to challenge things you’re not comfortable with
- .....to feel anxious
- .....to tell a joke
- .....to schedule some time just for yourself
- .....to feel like these are crazy times, because these are crazy times
- .....to share things that have helped you
- .....to say you’re not OK
- ..... and to ask for help

[\(click here for a downloadable PDF version of the above\)](#)

**And finally, below are various links to wellbeing resources which you may find useful:**

[Wellbeing Support | Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire LMC Ltd](#)

[Pastoral Care and Mentoring Service | Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire LMC Ltd](#)

**News** - For the latest news, information and weekly updates for practices, please visit the [Hot Topics](#) section of our website.

**BHLMC Job Board** - Advertise your practice vacancies or search for jobs on our [Job Board](#). If you are interested in posting an advert please contact [lmcadmin@bhlmc.co.uk](mailto:lmcadmin@bhlmc.co.uk) for more information.

**Locums** - If you are a Locum and would like to receive LMC updates, please register via the [online form](#) to be added to our database and mailing list.

**Workforce Wellbeing & Support** - [Visit our webpage](#).

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