

Interventions to minimise doctors' mental ill-health and its impacts on the workforce and patient care: the Care Under Pressure realist review

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Plain English summary

Care Under Pressure realist review

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Plain English summary

Doctors can suffer from high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal feelings and other mental illnesses due to very challenging demands and pressurised work environments. They worry about patient safety, the consequences of letting patients and colleagues down, and their careers. Many may work when unwell or choose to leave the profession.

There are gaps in our knowledge of the different factors contributing to mental ill-health in doctors (e.g. individual, organisational, contextual, social, cultural). Existing interventions and initiatives do not sufficiently understand or take into account these factors.

We conducted an interdisciplinary examination of studies and interventions to understand which strategies can help design more effective interventions, how such strategies are more likely to work and why.

We followed a method called realist review, which allowed us to analyse literature from different sources and incorporate the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders (including patient representatives, clinicians, doctors in training, medical educators and academics).

We found that:

- doctors' feelings of isolation and of being unable to do the job they were trained for, and their fear of the repercussions of seeking help, are key causes of mental ill-health
- interventions can promote doctors' and patients' well-being when they
 - emphasise relationships and belonging to teams
 - emphasise belonging to their profession
 - create people-focused working cultures
- work cultures that promote doctors' learning by balancing both positive and negative performance and aspects of a medical career could help prevent feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, and help them to thrive at work
- doctors' trust in an intervention, and in those delivering it, is essential for the intervention to be effective.

The report gives guidance and recommendations to policy-makers and leaders of organisations designing interventions to improve work cultures that tackle mental ill-health. Additionally, the research will help the development of new approaches to research doctors' mental health.

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