

Looking after Yourself

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University Centre for
RURAL HEALTH
education • research • workforce

Outline

- 1) Revisit the concept of Doctors' health
- 2) Burnout warning signs
- 3) Pathways for doctors to access health care
- 4) Strategies to improve our health & well being

Session content adapted from:

- *RACGP Curriculum for Australian General Practice (2016) - DH16: Doctors' health contextual unit* (<https://www.racgp.org.au/education/education-providers/curriculum/contextual-units/populations/dh16-doctors'-health>)
- *DRS4DRS* (www.drs4drs.com.au)

30 second assessment

Using any digital device...

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 7601 2488

... and answer this Q:

Describe the emotions you have experienced over the past month (1 word responses. Can submit up to 5 responses)

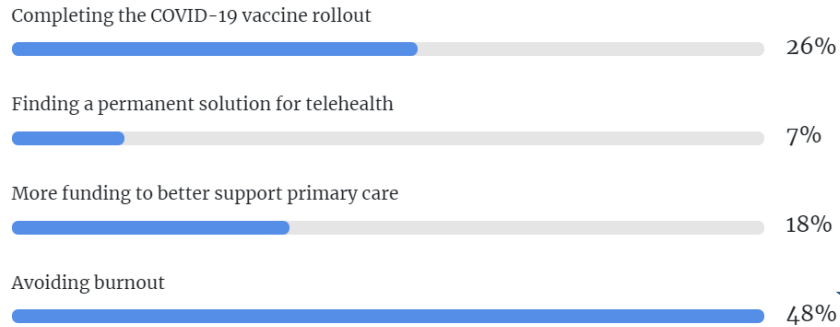
Presenting Issue

newsGP poll 17–24 May 2021 (Votes: 1048)

NEWSGP WEEKLY POLL

What is the main priority for GPs over the next 12 months?

The poll is closed.

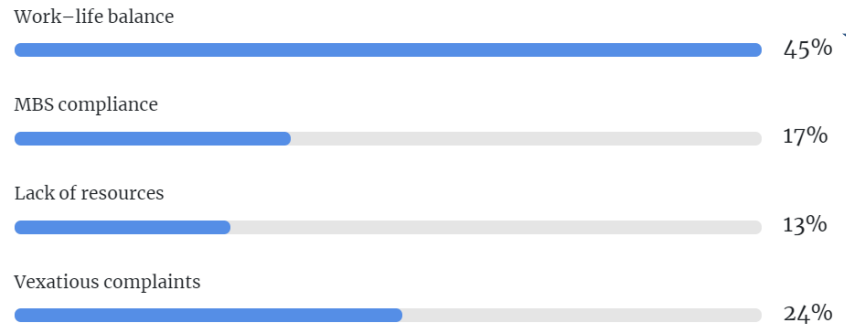


newsGP weekly poll 7–14 June 2021 (Votes: 993)

NEWSGP WEEKLY POLL

As a GP, what are you most concerned about professionally?

The poll is closed.

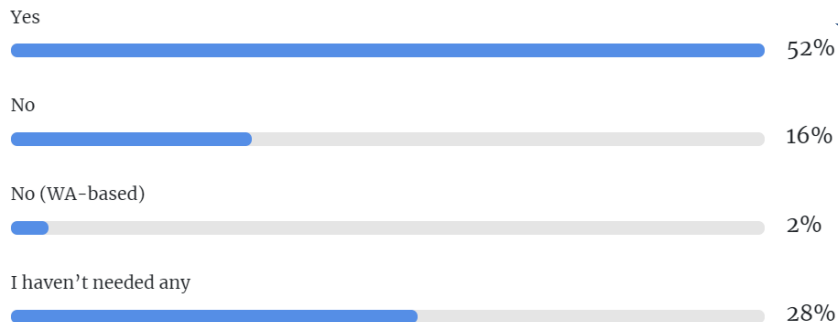


newsGP weekly poll 19–26 July 2021 (Votes: 896)

NEWSGP WEEKLY POLL

Have mandatory reporting laws ever dissuaded you from seeking mental health support?

The poll is closed.

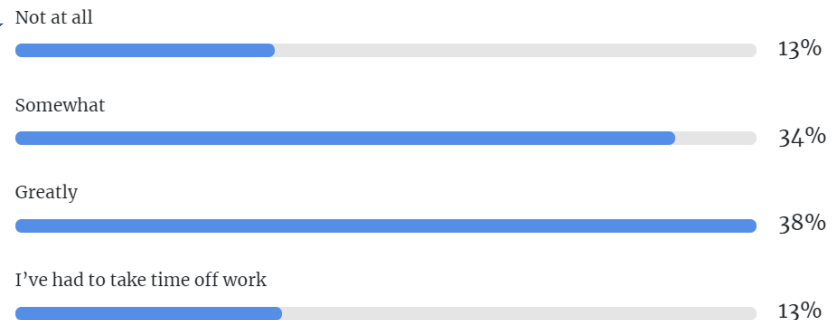


newsGP weekly poll 4–11 October 2021 (Votes: 1465)

NEWSGP WEEKLY POLL

How has working as a GP during the pandemic affected your mental health?

The poll is closed.



Hx of Presenting Issue: Doctors' Health

- Doctors' Health is the **understanding & practice** of safe health behaviours that are necessary to achieve & maintain **physical, psychological & social wellbeing**
- well balanced & healthy doctors are able to provide **higher quality patient care** through **enhanced empathy, skills in imparting positive health messages** & being **less likely to make mistakes due to stress/fatigue**
- medicine tends to attract personalities who are **hardworking, self-sacrificial & who hold themselves to high standards with tendencies to self-criticise**
- GPs are often more diligent in **caring for their patients compared to themselves**

PMHx: Stressors faced by GPs

GPs can have their physical & psychological health impacted by their work:

- **challenging nature of work:** providing high-quality continuity of care to a wide spectrum of patients with a broad range of complex conditions including physical, psychological & social issues
- **persistent stressors:** dealing with time pressures, insufficient resources, poor remuneration, lack of appreciation, aggressive patients who may threaten a doctor's physical safety, patient complaints with the threat of medico-legal issues, etc...

Examination: Signs & Symptoms

- GPs are at risk of experiencing **psychological issues** e.g. stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, addiction (esp. alcohol & prescription drugs), dysfunctional interpersonal relationships
- **burnout** may be recognised by a number of signs including:
 - persistent fatigue (NB: need to exclude other pathology)
 - cynicism
 - emotional exhaustion
 - feelings of depersonalisation (decreased capacity to empathise with patients)
 - perceptions of being ineffective
- at any point in time, approx. **1 in 3 doctors suffer from burnout**
- recognising & addressing signs of burnout are important skills for all GPs

Burnout Warning Signs in Oneself & Colleagues



Mx: How Drs access health care

Table comparing the responses of a fictitious patient & a Dr to the same stimuli

Health State	Ways to respond	Patient AB response	Doctor CD response
WELLNESS	See GP for preventive checks	Yes, on recall system	No - tests self
	Participate in workplace health programs	Yes - skin, fitness, manual handling	No
	Good lifestyle habits (SNAPS)	Yes	Not needed, no time
ILLNESS	Self-Rx with OTC medication	Yes	Yes
	See the pharmacist	Yes	No
	See GP if not better	Yes	No
	Take prescribed medication	Yes	No - self-prescribes
	Use sick leave for time off work	Yes	No - goes to work
IMPAIRMENT	Hospital treatment	Yes	Avoids - continues to privately self-manage
	Use extended sick leave	Yes, has lots	No - in private practice
	Access to a return to work program	Yes	No

Mx: How Drs access health care

Doctors therefore have a choice of ways to access health care - formal, informal or a **blend** of the two.

Formal health care

- having one's own GP
- consulting a colleague interstate or overseas face-to-face or via the web
- tele-medicine

Informal care

- colleagues via corridor consultations or 'conference dinner' consultations
- self-prescription, self-investigation
- drug samples
- self-help websites

Blended care

- most of the profession practises a 'blended' form of healthcare whereby they may self-manage some conditions, self-refer, self-investigate and self-medicate or seek the opinion of a GP for selected conditions.
- mental illness is often managed privately, often away from the gaze of their usual GP

When one **compares** the privacy and convenience of self-management, it is understandable that some doctors prefer this to avoid the steps needed to access formal health care from a doctor's surgery and having to endure *"the waiting room experience"* and avoid the opportunity cost of attending in-hours.

Comparison of
advantages &
disadvantages of
formal & informal
health care for Drs

FORMAL CARE	INFORMAL CARE
Independent assessment of problems	Self-management with no disclosure to anyone
Creates a medical record	No medical record
Recall systems	Reliance on self for preventive care
Fee for Service	Free
Follow up	No follow-up
Inconvenience of attending	You are your own convenient, 24/7 doctor
Multiple steps taken to access it	Self-management bypasses all the usual steps

Mx: GPs for GPs

- many GPs do not have their own independent GP. This may lead to **self-diagnosis & self-medication**; ignore signs and struggle to admit illness – which for many is seen as a sign of failure
- GPs need the **insight to recognise** if & when their acute or chronic, physical or mental health condition begins to impair their ability to provide care so that they access care for themselves in a timely manner. NB: having a chronic illness rarely correlates with impairment to practice
- doctors should see themselves as people who practise medicine – i.e. as **people first & foremost** – with all the **human needs & weaknesses** that apply to the wider population
- in addition to optimising their health for personal wellbeing, doctors also have a **professional obligation to maintain their own health**

Code of Conduct: Australian Doctors

11 Ensuring doctors' health

11.1 Introduction

As a doctor, it is important for you to maintain your own health and wellbeing. This includes seeking an appropriate work-life balance.

11.2 Your health

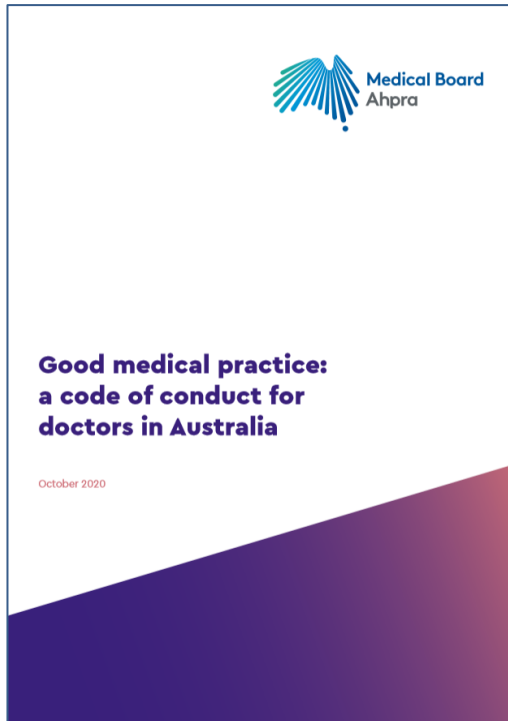
Good medical practice involves:

- 11.2.1 Having a general practitioner.
- 11.2.2 Seeking independent, objective advice when you need medical care, and being aware of the risks of self-diagnosis and self-treatment.
- 11.2.3 Seeking help if you are suffering stress, burnout, anxiety or depression.
- 11.2.4 Making sure that you are immunised against relevant communicable diseases.
- 11.2.5 Not self-prescribing.
- 11.2.6 Recognising the impact of fatigue on your health and your ability to care for patients, and endeavouring to work safe hours wherever possible.
- 11.2.7 Being aware of the doctors' health program in your state or territory which provides confidential advice and support through the doctors' health advisory and referral services.
- 11.2.8 If you know or suspect that you have a health condition or impairment that could adversely affect your judgement, performance or your patient's health:
 - not relying on your own assessment of the risk you pose to patients
 - consulting your doctor about whether, and in what ways, you may need to modify your practice, and following the doctor's advice.

11.3 Other doctors' health

Doctors have a responsibility to assist medical colleagues to maintain good health. Good medical practice involves:

- 11.3.1 Providing doctors who are your patients with the same quality of care you would provide to other patients.
- 11.3.2 Notifying the Medical Board of Australia if you are treating a doctor whose ability to practise is impaired and is placing patients at substantial risk of harm. This is always a professional responsibility and, in some jurisdictions, may be a statutory responsibility under the National Law.²⁷
- 11.3.3 Supporting your colleagues and encouraging any of them (whom you are not treating) to seek appropriate help if you believe they may be ill and impaired. If you believe this impairment is putting patients at risk of substantial harm, notify the Medical Board of Australia. It may also be wise to report your concerns to the doctor's employer and seek advice from a doctors' health service or your professional indemnity insurer.
- 11.3.4 Recognising the impact of fatigue on the health of colleagues, including those under your supervision, and facilitating safe working hours wherever possible.



Accessed at:

(<https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-policies/code-of-conduct.aspx>)

Mx: Self-Care for GPs

Care includes that provided to the wider population:

- risk-appropriate screening
- support for health-promoting behaviours:
 - stress management
 - have a healthy diet
 - exercise
 - participate in enjoyable activities
- develop structures to address professional isolation; to achieve & maintain social & emotional wellbeing...

30 second assessment

Using any digital device...

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 7601 2488

... and answer this Q:

What strategies have you used to cope during personally challenging times?

Self-care strategies to support wellbeing

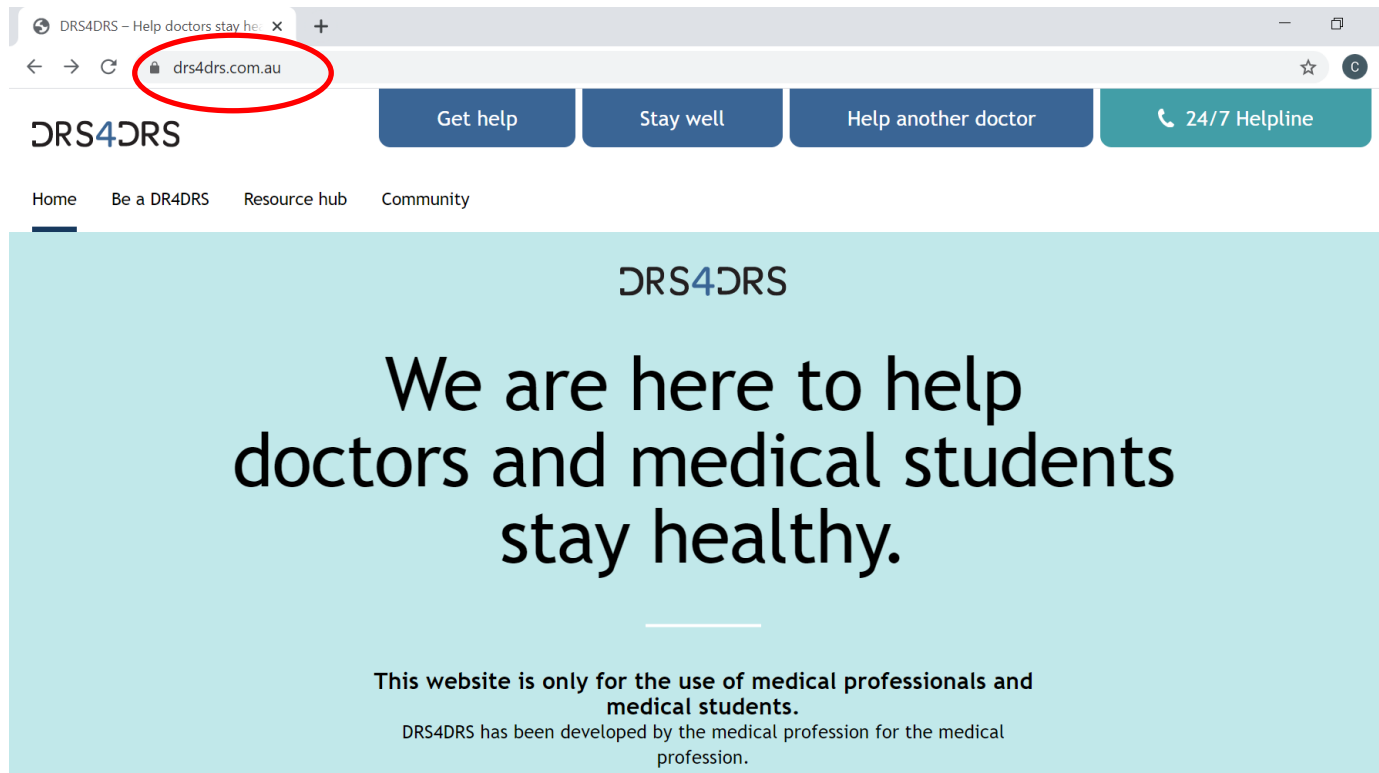
- ✓ not taking work home, where possible
- ✓ scheduling regular breaks
- ✓ being realistic with time and avoiding overcommitting
- ✓ developing and maintaining healthy therapeutic boundaries
- ✓ debriefing with colleagues regularly
- ✓ demanding a good work–life balance (and not seeing this as a sign of weakness)
- ✓ maintaining a healthy, balanced diet
- ✓ scheduling regular physical activity
- ✓ practising good sleep habits
- ✓ practising mindfulness
- ✓ participating in activities that bring personal joy
- ✓ making your relationships a priority and enjoying time with family and friends
- ✓ maintaining connection with culture, country and community
- ✓ establishing a relationship with an independent GP to assist you to manage your own health.

Mx: GP sub-groups at risk

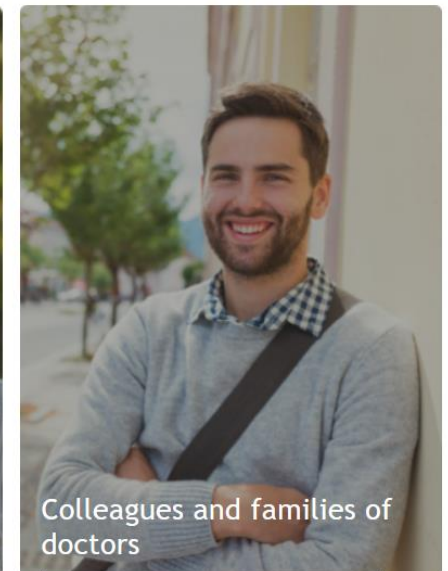
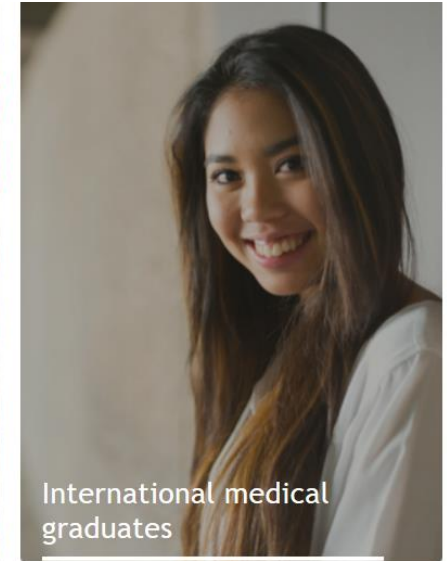
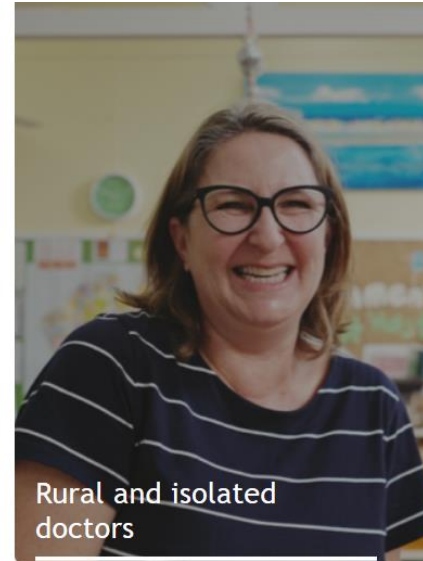
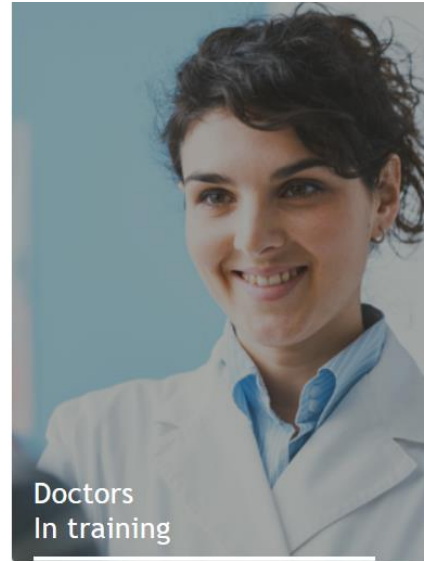
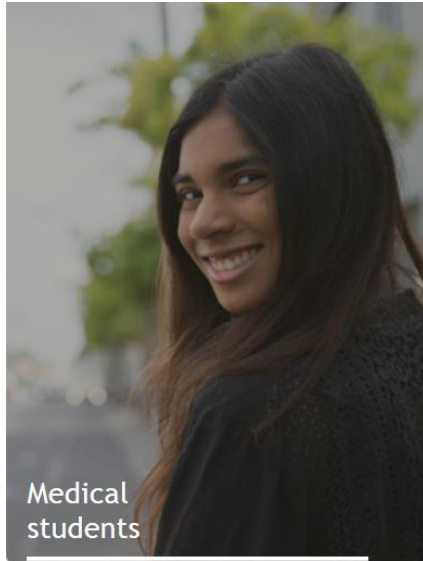
- Rural GPs recognised to be at risk of having difficulty accessing care
- GPs sub-groups at risk of developing health issues related to their work:
 - GPs working with vulnerable communities e.g. indigenous communities, refugees/asylum seekers, palliative care patients, victims of family violence, patients with complex PTSD, addictions or severe mental health &/or social issues
 - recent graduates who experience unique pressures & access issues
 - IMGs & female GPs
- Seek out mentors who successfully model work–life balance & healthy behaviours

Mx Resources: DRS4DRS

- an independent program providing confidential support & resources to Drs & med students across Aust
- website provides coordinated access to mental health & wellbeing resources, training on becoming a Dr for Drs, navigation to each state/territory helpline & referral services
- **confidential phone advice available 24/7 for any Dr/med student in NSW: (02) 9437 6552**



Access resources which focus on different groups of doctors:



DRS4DRS

[General enquiries](#) | [Technical support](#) | [Terms of service](#) | [Privacy policy](#)

A A A



WINLO



A Healthy Medical Profession

Caring for Ourselves and Our Colleagues

This learning module will broaden your understanding of your own health and the health of the medical profession. It will help you to explore the importance of prevention and timely intervention, the help-seeking behaviour of doctors and the benefits of having your own GP.

Click on the 'ENTER THIS COURSE' button to continue. If you are not already enrolled in the course, there will be an option self enrol after you click on the 'ENTER THIS COURSE' button.

ENTER THIS COURSE

1. Introduction

2. Self-Care | Part A

3. Health Access for Doctors

4. The Doctor as a Patient

5. The Doctor as a Doctor's Doctor

6. Self-Care | Part B

7. Conclusion and Appendices



Also refer to 'Resource List' handout

- *'Self-care & mental health resources for general practitioners':*
<https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/Running%20a%20practice/Practice%20management/Self-care-and-mental-health-resources-for-general-practitioners.PDF>
- *'GP Support Program':* <https://www.racgp.org.au/membership/the-gp-support-program>
- *'Keeping the Doctor Alive':*
<https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDEDEV/media/documents/Running%20a%20practice/Practice%20resources/Keeping-the-doctor-alive.pdf>

Any Qs? Email Winston at w.lo@westernsydney.edu.au