



# Keeping yourself well

Support and strategies to  
look after yourself and each other



The Royal  
Australian &  
New Zealand  
College of  
Psychiatrists



The Royal Australian and New Zealand  
College of Psychiatrists  
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*The College is here to support you. Psychiatry can be a wonderful and rewarding profession and we want you to take care of your health, wellbeing and support your peers throughout your membership journey.*

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## Keep yourself well.

- You and your work are valuable. Your health and wellbeing are critical.
- Connect with your peers and loved ones.
- Do things that bring joy and purpose, in and out of work.
- The College is here to support you. Check in with us.

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# Support for members

We encourage you to be familiar with avenues to seek assistance, both in regards to your training or practice, and your welfare and wellbeing.

The Member Welfare Support Line is a good place to start for confidential assistance.

## Member Welfare Support Line

For confidential support and advice contact the Member Welfare Support Line on **1800 941 002** (AU) and **0800 220 784** (NZ) or [support@ranzcp.org](mailto:support@ranzcp.org).

This is a dedicated support line available to all members of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP). All calls are separate to the main College telephone line. Calls are answered by the Support Manager during business hours. If appropriate, you will be put in touch with a Support Fellow who will be able to provide you with further support and refer you to appropriate services.

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The RANZCP offers members additional resources and information to support their wellbeing. Visit [ranzcp.org/support](http://ranzcp.org/support).



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**MEMBER WELFARE  
SUPPORT LINE**  
For confidential assistance  
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# Where to get help

## PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Doctors Health Advisory Services](#)
- associations of psychiatrists in training
- medical indemnity insurers
- peer support groups
- general practitioners
- [mentors](#).



## PERSONAL SUPPORTS

- friends
- family
- personal interest groups
- religious or spiritual leaders
- colleagues.



## WORKPLACE SUPPORTS

- human resources department
- employee assistance program
- workplace wellbeing programs
- senior staff and clinical directors
- union representatives.



## RANZCP SUPPORTS

- Member Welfare Support Line
- Member Wellbeing Subcommittee
- supervisors and Directors of Training
- representative committees
- [Support for members](#) webpage.



For more support and information visit [\*\*ranzcp.org/support\*\*](https://ranzcp.org/support)

# Keeping yourself well

## Support and strategies to look after yourself and each other

Those working within the health care sector, including doctors and medical students, report higher rates of psychological distress than other professions. Although low, research has found that doctors have higher rates of suicidal thoughts than the general population and other professions (Beyond Blue, 2019). Psychiatry has the added stressors of frequent exposure to distressing emotions and human suffering.

Acknowledging that occasionally things are tough or that you are struggling can be difficult. One of the biggest barriers for doctors accessing support services is the perceived stigma associated with 'stress' or 'mental illness'.

**It's OK to struggle, but it's NOT OK to suffer in silence.**

***Learn to recognize signs of stress, depression, and burnout in yourself. Reach out to colleagues for assistance and support. Sharing your experiences with colleagues may help others in similar situations. Additionally, the support of colleagues can be a great source of comfort during difficult times.'***

Brooks 2019





Trying to find a balance between your career, personal/family life and/or training commitments can feel like an ongoing battle. There is no magic formula to keep every aspect of your life thriving.

It is however important to recognise that stressors in one domain of your life can overlap with another. There will be times in your life where you need to prioritise your own wellbeing.

**IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THE HIGH RISK ZONE HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES TO HELP REGAIN YOUR BALANCE.**



**Promote self-care activities**

It's time to book in that holiday you've been thinking about, or take a day off to spend time with loved ones. Prioritise those activities that help you relax.



**Manage your time effectively**

Ensure you schedule time for admin and learning during the day and delegate paperwork to practice staff where possible. Always aim to leave work on time.



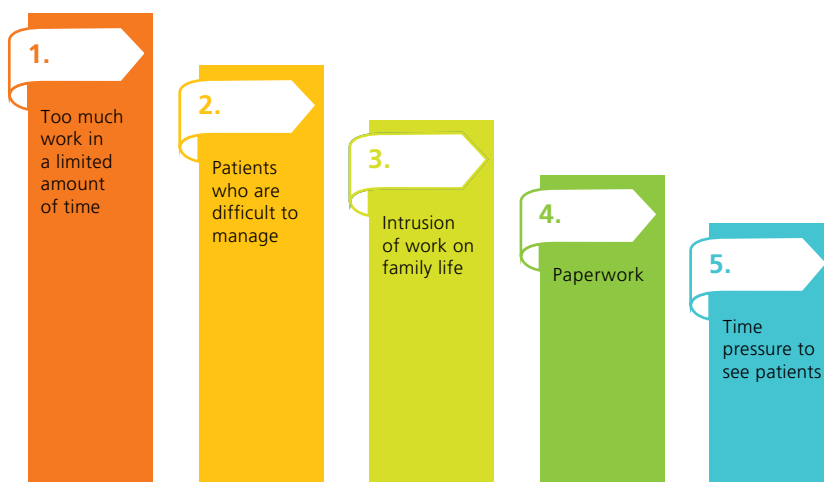
**Become self aware**

Practicing some form of spirituality, mindfulness or meditation can help you become aware of your stressors and coping styles, and work towards a positive frame of mind and improve your mental resilience.

Clode & Boldero 2005

# Responding to stress

## TOP 5 STRESSORS FOR RANZCP MEMBERS



RANZCP 2016. Membership Engagement Committee study into the welfare of psychiatrists and trainees.

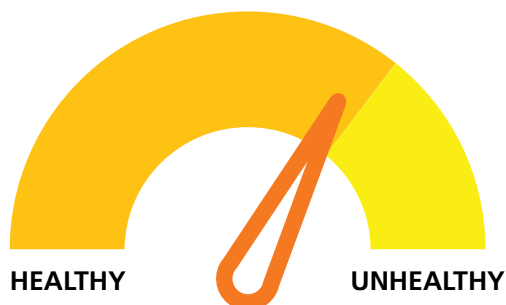
### WHAT DO YOU FIND STRESSFUL?

Understanding and attending to how you feel, what your attitudes are and how you respond to particular situations will help build your resilience and ensure you keep yourself well.

### HOW DO YOU COPE?

**Everyone copes with stressful events differently. Some examples of coping mechanisms are:**

- breaking a problem down into smaller parts
- seeking assistance
- avoiding the issue
- becoming withdrawn
- consuming more indulgent food or drink
- sleeping more
- using alcohol or other drugs
- exercise.



### HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR COPING STYLE?

Not all coping styles are healthy. Some coping styles may provide temporary relief, but leave you with much bigger problems down the track.

Consider how you may be able to adjust your coping style to incorporate more self-care activities, particularly during times of high stress.



## Stress is inevitable at times

Foreseeable times of increased stress include transitioning to a new job, moving home, exams, conflict at work, and personal losses.

Take a moment to remind yourself of some of the ways you can **manage your stress**.



### **Develop a strong network of peers and close friends**

Your peers are going through similar experiences and can provide you with valuable support and guidance.



### **Focus on achieving a career-life balance**

Determine those things in your life that are important to you and make them a priority.



### **Consider lifestyle factors**

Ensure you eat a balanced diet, maintain healthy sleep patterns and moderate your consumption of alcohol.



### **Develop healthy work routines**

Implement healthy work practices such as taking breaks, planning admin time in advance and transitioning into your social role with a gym session or walk.



### **Focus on your achievements and strengths**

Take a moment to reflect on your strengths and achievements. You have already achieved so much.



### **Maintain your faith and spiritual values**

Having faith and spiritual values can help you during times of stress.



### **Work on your professional relationships**

Invest in your relationships with your colleagues.



### **Know your limits**

Acknowledge when you are unable work effectively, and seek external help early.

# Burnout

**Physician burnout is a long-term stress reaction characterized by depersonalization, including cynical or negative attitudes toward patients, emotional exhaustion, a feeling of decreased personal achievement and a lack of empathy for patients.'**

Okanlawon 2015

A Beyond Blue report (2019) found that doctors reported higher rates of burnout than the general population.

There are both individual and systemic risk factors for developing burnout.

## WHAT DOES BURNOUT LOOK LIKE?



**Needing more time than usual to unwind from work**



**Feeling irritable with colleagues and patients**



**Not feeling satisfied with your job**



**Feeling tired even after sufficient sleep**



**Sarcasm.**

## FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO WORKPLACE BURNOUT:\*

- A lack of balance in your career/family/study life
- Problems with relationships with senior colleagues
- Fear of making mistakes
- Professional isolation
- Low morale amongst staff
- Long and irregular work hours
- Lack of flexibility in rostering
- Excessive workload and workload inefficiencies
- Exposure to occupational violence and patient suicide
- High number of challenging patients
- Lack of supervision
- Psychiatry not being your first career choice.

\*Shanafelt & Noseworthy 2017, Jovanović et al 2016

## IMPACT OF BURNOUT

Burnout not only affects personal wellbeing, but also affects patient care and the efficacy of the health care system in which we work. Some of the impacts are:

- impaired patient satisfaction and increased medical error
- reduced learning capacity
- stress-related health problems
- impact on personal and workplace relationships
- low retention of staff in psychiatry.

**“...to see human suffering and need all around oneself and to constantly be on the teeter-totter of other-care vs. self-care... demands its own kind of resilience. To be successful in the helping professions, we must continually maintain professional vitality and avoid depleted caring.”**

Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison 2016



## COMPASSION FATIGUE

Helping people can be very rewarding, and even addictive, but it's important to not overstretch your compassion as it can leave you feeling fatigued.

## PHYSICAL FATIGUE

Check if you are at risk of fatigue with the [AMA's fatigue risk assessment tool](#).

# How to combat burnout

Recognise that you may be burnt out. Take a [burnout questionnaire](#) and/or speak to your GP about how you have been feeling.

## SELF CARE

Practicing effective self-care techniques such as mindfulness and regular debriefing are vital to helping you renew your energy.

## BOUNDARIES

Develop clear boundaries between your role as a doctor and that of a friend or partner.

Write down stressful events you experienced that day and throw the paper away before heading home.

Build a relaxing activity into your routine to help transition into the social part of your day.

Know your limits. Consider taking some leave, exploring some time in a non-clinical role, or consider a break in training. Your mental health is a priority.

## CONNECT

Your professional and social networks work to protect you from burnout.

Use your colleagues for support and debriefing. Join a peer support group or Balint group. Consider joining the [RANZCP Mentoring Program](#).

Prioritise time with your family and friends and allow these relationships to help you unwind.

## GET INVOLVED

Many of the factors that lead to burnout in doctors are related to the system you work in. Have you thought about participating in your local service to support positive workplace change? Evidence suggests this can help you feel more empowered and tackle burnout.

For more information on effective workplace change, have a look at the [HeadsUp](#) webpage or the AMA module on [Creating the Organizational Foundation for Joy in Medicine™](#) for ideas to take to your leadership team.

## CELEBRATE

Acknowledge gains, even the small ones. Celebrate personal and professional achievements.

Reflect on your role and the positive impact this can have on another's life.

# Have your own GP

***None of us in the medical profession should ever be our own doctor – we all need and deserve good independent and objective medical advice.'***

Dr Kym Jenkins, RANZCP Past President

A good GP will get to know you as a person and be able to take a holistic approach to your health needs. It's not only important to have your own GP, it is also important to have a GP with whom you feel comfortable enough to share some of your innermost thoughts and anxieties. Sometimes this means moving on from the family GP that you've grown up with.

## **HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT GP FOR YOU**

Choosing your GP can be a very personal decision and we all tend to look for different qualities or a have preference for a certain style.

### **Look for a GP who:**

- is comfortable treating members of the medical profession
- appreciates that it's hard making the transition from care giver to care receiver
- allocates additional consulting time when necessary
- treats you like a patient and not a colleague (for example, arranges your follow up and explains things as if you have no prior knowledge).

Finding a GP that suits you is a personal choice and you may need to try several GPs before you find the one that suits you.

There are a growing number of GPs who have a keen interest in helping their colleagues and who have undergone specific training to be GPs for other doctors.

Doctors health advisory services can refer you to GPs who have a specific interest in this area. The contact numbers for the doctors health advisory services along with other useful services are available at [ranzcp.org/support](http://ranzcp.org/support).

The College's [Find a Psychiatrist](#) service can also help you find a psychiatrist that is comfortable treating colleagues. Under 'Has experience with', select 'Doctors, psychiatrists or medical students'.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY WITH YOUR GP**

The confidentiality of consultations with your GP is a given. Nothing you say or do should be disclosed to a third party unless:

1. You want it to be.
2. Your doctor is obliged to report under mandatory reporting laws. They are set out in the [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency \(AHPRA\)](#) website or the [Medical Council of New Zealand \(MCNZ\)](#) website.

Feeling stressed, depressed or having a mental illness are certainly not in themselves grounds for mandatory reporting.

Written by Dr Kym Jenkins, RANZCP Past President

# Self care

Self care is simply any action you make to take care of your physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health.

It is unique for everyone and what works for you may not work for others.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

- learn something new
- counselling
- mindfulness
- turn off all technology for an afternoon
- make time for your hobbies outside of work.

## SPIRITUAL

- reflect on your work
- prayer
- meditation
- forgiveness
- find meaning and purpose.



## EMOTIONAL

- positive self-talk
- laughter
- express how you feel.

## PHYSICAL

- nutrition
- sleep
- exercise
- routine health contacts
- utilise sick leave
- reduce alcohol intake.

## WORKPLACE

- take regular breaks
- peer support
- supervision
- negotiate time off
- employee assistance program
- human resources
- get involved.

## RELATIONSHIPS

- spend time on meaningful relationships
- schedule a date night
- connect with friends on social media
- ask for support from friends and peers.

# Bullying and harassment

Bullying and harassment should not be tolerated.

Most instances of bullying or harassment tend to occur in the workplace and complaints will be handled within that organisation.

However, if you are a trainee or Specialist International Medical Graduate (SIMG) and experience an incident in the workplace that involves your supervisor or Director of Training, you should refer to the RANZCP [Discrimination, Bullying and Harassment Policy](#).

## WHAT IS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT?

Harassment can involve unwanted behaviour and can take many forms but ultimately makes the victim feel offended and humiliated, intimidated or frightened, and/or uncomfortable at work.

Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to health and safety.

## Bullying behaviour includes, but is not limited to the following:

- manipulation
- intimidation
- offensive remarks or behaviour
- degrading remarks or behaviour
- belittling remarks; ridiculing someone's opinion
- unreasonable persistent criticism which is not part of the performance review process
- nitpicking and fault finding without justification
- verbal and physical abuse (for example shouting or throwing things)
- isolation of colleagues
- withholding information employees need to perform their job
- setting unachievable targets with the intent of causing individuals to fail
- sabotaging someone's work.



If you are experiencing bullying or harassment in the workplace, contact the

**MEMBER WELFARE SUPPORT LINE**  
on **1800 941 002** (AU) **0800 220 784** (NZ) or [support@ranzcp.org](mailto:support@ranzcp.org) for a confidential discussion.

## Working in rural and remote locations

Working in a rural location is a great opportunity to expand your clinical skills, improve your knowledge on different health care models and learn about different communities. It can provide you with unique professional development opportunities, hands-on learning and increased autonomy and responsibility.

As rewarding as it is, working in rural locations comes with its own unique challenges. It's easy to become isolated from your usual support networks such as friends and family, resulting in increased occupational stress.



**Below are some tips to reduce isolation and get the best out of your time living and working in a rural area.**



Keep in contact with your friends and family. They may be physically far away, but ensure you schedule regular video chats or telephone calls to keep you connected to those you care about.



Keep your regular routine. If you normally love to exercise, cook or spend your weekends socialising try to continue those activities.



Learn about the community and take the time to explore the local area. Speak with the hospital staff or local tourism operator to find out about local events, sporting events, markets etc. to find reasons to get out and meet new people.

If you find yourself requiring assistance while working in a rural location contact [CRANAplus Bush Support Services](#) which provides free telephone counselling, debriefing, psychological interventions and support services to rural and remote area health professionals and their families.



**CRANAplus Bush Support**  
on **1800 805 391**



## Supporting each other

We all have periods in our lives that are more stressful or difficult than others, but it's important to recognise – not only in yourself, but also your peers – when feelings of stress and anxiety could be signs of a more serious problem.

### CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR TO KEEP AN EYE ON:



**Irritable or moody with patients and colleagues**



**Easily distracted by things around you**



**Decreased interest in attending social gatherings**



**Changes in your appetite or weight**



**Decrease in quality of documentation and clinical performance**



**Changes in personal hygiene.**



See the AMA's module on [Physician Suicide and Support](#) for more detailed suggestions and tools for practice to help our medical colleagues.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Helping a colleague can be as simple as just having an open and honest conversation.

1

### **Be prepared**

You will need to be in a good head space for a meaningful conversation and ensure you start the conversation at a time and place that's appropriate for both of you.

2

### **How to start the conversation**

Start by mentioning the specific things you have noticed in your colleague that has concerned you. For example, 'You seem less chatty than usual. How are you going?'

3

### **Listen without judgement**

Take the time to actively listen to what they are saying and resist the temptation to interrupt or rush the conversation.

4

### **Encourage action**

In addition to encouraging them to engage in self-care activities, it's important to emphasise the value of accessing support services early on.

5

### **Check in**

After your initial conversation, stay in touch and check in on your colleague. The additional support can really make a difference.



There may be situations where the encouragement and support of your peers is not enough. Just like anyone else, doctors are also at risk of substance abuse disorders, professional misconduct or physical or mental impairment. If this is the case, you are encouraged to access professional support early on to ensure the situation does not escalate to a point where your ability to practise is compromised.

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