

Emergency medicine well-being week: Healthy work < life balance

Retention and recruitment of medical and nursing staff are major issues affecting Emergency departments across the UK, although substantial progress has been made in recent years. RCEM's recently released 'Vision 2020' document addressing what is required to secure a better future for the specialty highlights the centrality of safe levels of well trained staff with successful, satisfying and sustainable careers. www.rcem.ac.uk/RCEM/Quality-Policy/Policy/Vision_2020.aspx?WebsiteKey=b3d6bb2a-abba-44ed-b758-467776a958cd&hkey=44955e65-f65e-4846-be91-b31ea7eba89d&New_ContentCollectionOrganizerCommon=1#New_ContentCollectionOrganizerCommon The ongoing pilot (applications for which have closed) of less than full-time training as a matter of personal choice (in addition to reasons of caring responsibility, health or unique opportunities) confirms that this is also recognised by other stakeholders such as Health Education England and the GMC. It will be evaluated fully in due course – and EMTA will continue to collect data on this and other matters through our annual trainee surveys. In the meantime, standard guidance on less than full time training can be found at www.bma.org.uk/news/2017/april/scheme-to-improve-work-life-balance-in-emergency-medicine and via your local LETB (deanery). Going out of programme is particularly popular in EM and there are many ways of enhancing your training or simply taking a career break.

www.rcem.ac.uk/RCEM/Exams_Training/UK_Trainees/Out_of_Programme/RCEM/Exams_Training/UK_Trainees/Out_of_Programme.aspx?hkey=6849897c-080c-402b-8a8b-55adca651bc1. Another factor to be considered is the recent changes to shared parental leave which should promote flexibility for families:

careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/Sharing_the_caring%3A_doctors_and_shared_parental_leave

I want to be absolutely clear, however, that working less is not the only solution to improving work-life balance.

The Mayo clinic offer a number of suggestions for improving work-life balance, including leaving work at work, time management and looking after yourself: www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/art-20048134?pg=2 These points are expanded on by Prof Boris Groysberg in the Harvard Business Review, based on international work with business executives hbr.org/2014/03/manage-your-work-manage-your-life. Doctors, especially during training, have traditionally sacrificed their work-life balance and that this has, and continues to, impact on our families and social circles. Although a support network is essential, it is also right to be cautious about protecting family time from encroaching work tasks.

The important principle, encapsulated by Betsy Jacobson, that work-life balance is, “not better time management, but better boundary management,” is expounded by business consultant and mountaineer Heather Geluk: peopleyoumeetalongtheway.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/balance-is-not-better-time-management.html Defining goals and priorities in our lives outside work is an important step. Those of us on rotational training may have limited control of our placements, commuting distance or even our rotas. Some of the art of balancing work and life for EM trainees, I believe, has to involve accommodating the ebb and flow of rotas and times of exam preparation etc.

Much of this functions on large and small scales. Dividing up annual leave thoughtfully can help balance work, rest and life. Even within a single shift, taking a break increases your overall efficiency. www.acep.org/Clinical---Practice-Management/Efficiency-in-the-Emergency-Department/

Because every one of us will have different circumstances, rather than sharing resources about healthy living habits while working shifts – meal planning, periodised / mesocycle fitness programmes etc –I'd like to offer two exercises for crystallising work-life balance, both taken from Stanford's excellent physician well-being website wellmd.stanford.edu/center1.html. This short questionnaire www.cmha.ca/mental_health/work-life-balance-quiz/#.WYxXE1WGPDC and the self-explanatory 'balance wheel' wellmd.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/wellmd/documents/Life-balance-tools.pdf. I'd suggest discussing it with your supervisor, consultant and/or partner. Especially if your balance wheel is very small or distorted, take that seriously and get yourself some more support. See your GP. Make changes.

So why work<life balance in the title? For the same reason that one of my colleagues says 'life-work balance'. The priority has to be your own health and your family. Sometimes it is necessary to remember that however worthwhile and satisfying EM can be, the department can and will continue to function if you have to take time to attend to your well-being.