Dear GP…….how are you?
What we have learned about GP wellbeing from post-pandemic appraisals?

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Background

GPs are under immense pressure with increased workload, increased demand and a lack of workforce[1]. It is challenging for them to look after their own wellbeing.

The Medical Appraisal Guide 2020 included a new focus on personal and professional wellbeing. The template asks the question "On a scale of 1-10 How are you?" followed by the opportunity to share "Comments on your wellbeing". I was interested to know:

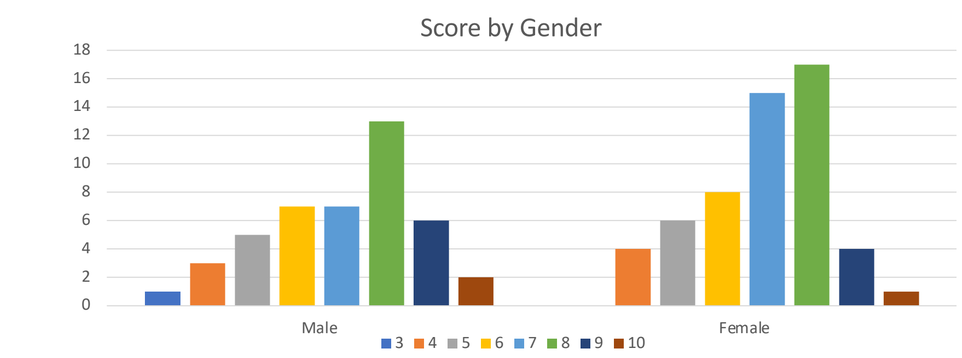
- Can the wellbeing section help us gather evidence about what's having a negative impact on GP wellbeing in Wessex?
- Is the section valuable?
- Are GPs using appraisal as a way of discussing their wellbeing?
- Can we use this information to help GP wellbeing, boost morale, find ways to protect our workforce and do more to support GPs?

Methods:

- I analysed 100 Wessex GP appraisals from April and May 2021 (56 female GPs and 44 male GPs).
- I collected and analysed the numeric data from the "How are you?" question.
- I collected qualitative data from the "Comments on wellbeing" section and carried out thematic analysis on this.
- I analysed the data according to gender and the role the GP has at work.
- I next analysed the "Appraisal Discussion" section and the "Agreed PDP" section to see if the wellbeing concerns that had been raised were then addressed in the appraisal.

Results:

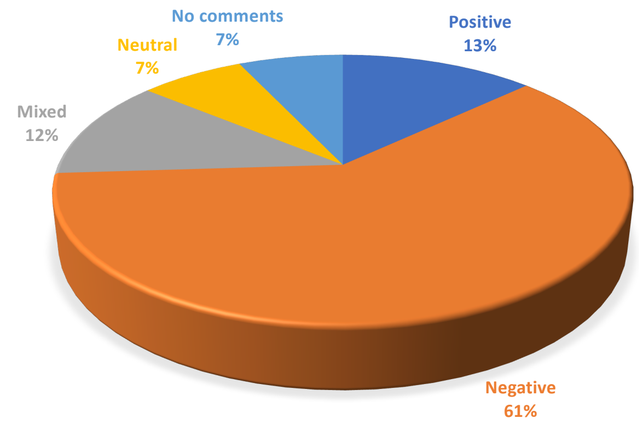
The most common answer to the "How are you?" Question was 8/10. This was the same for both genders and for all types of job role.



30 GPs in total scored 8/10. Of those 30 GPs only 4 wrote purely positive comments on their wellbeing. 15/30 of them wrote predominantly negative comments.

Despite the distribution of the numeric score answer the majority of "comments on wellbeing" were overwhelmingly negative. 61% of appraisees wrote only negative comments about their wellbeing.

Pie chart showing the quantity of positive/negative/mixed comments on wellbeing



Negative themes in Comments on wellbeing:

47% said that "Workload" had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

21% talked about decreasing their number of clinical sessions to improve their wellbeing. 11% had already decreased their sessions and 9% planned to imminently.

22% of GPs said that juggling childcare with work had a negative impact on their wellbeing. 77% of those that mentioned childcare were female.

12% used the word "stress". 9% said they had suffered with depression and/or anxiety. 14% said they are "unable" to look after their wellbeing.

Quotes from the negative comments in the wellbeing section

- Doing extra hours virtually everyday
- Dreary
- I can't look after my wellbeing
- Work is like a pressure cooker
- Juggling childcare and work is a constant strain
- Work fluctuates from high to unmanageable
- Decreased clinical sessions to be able to stay in the profession
- Becoming a locum has improved my wellbeing

Was there anything positive?

- 50% of the GPs mentioned some kind of self care,
- Exercise was the most commonly sited form of self care with running being most popular.
- Females more commonly mentioned self care than males.

Are wellbeing concerns being addressed in the appraisal discussion and the agreed PDP?

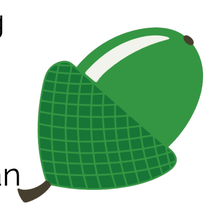
- 23% of appraisers mentioned wellbeing in their "Summary of discussion".
- 8% of appraisers signposted their appraisee to a service relevant to wellbeing.
- 36% of appraisees had an agreed PDP based around improving their ability to maintain health and wellbeing. .

Discussion

- It was interesting to see the striking discordance between the numeric score and the commentary on wellbeing. What does this mean? Are GPs reluctant to expose that they aren't coping? Are GPs, like other highly performing professional groups, likely to keep going and push themselves then suddenly hit burnout? It would be useful to understand why the majority of GPs scoring an 8/10 are then negative about their wellbeing when they open up in the commentary.

- The majority of GPs are writing about their wellbeing in a negative way. Knowing that workload, workforce and juggling childcare are some of the most common themes having a negative impact on GP wellbeing in this study, how can we adapt our working environment to improve GP wellbeing and potentially improve workforce sustainability?

- The wellbeing section of the appraisal is felt to be valuable by the majority of GPs in feedback[2]. This study demonstrated that GPs are using this section to reflect on factors having an impact on their wellbeing and on how to mitigate them.. We have room for improvement to use appraisal as an opportunity to signpost GPs to services to help with their wellbeing.



References:
1. Pressures in General Practice data analysis, The BMA, June 2022
2. Lowris work

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