

CREATING A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Nurses' mental and physical health affect how they care for patients. Jenny Sergeant and Colette Laws-Chapman suggest how managers can improve teamwork and raise morale through 'emotional resilience' training

Abstract

This article considers the link between emotional resilience and the mental and physical wellbeing of healthcare staff, and how this affects leadership and patient care. The authors outline six steps to building and sustaining emotional resilience. In two NHS surveys (Boorman 2009, Healthcare Commission 2010) staff reported that their physical health and emotional wellbeing affected their ability to undertake daily activities and their ability to care for patients. Some NHS trusts are addressing staff wellbeing through emotional resilience training. Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, for example, includes it in its preceptorship programme, which supports transition from student to staff nurse.

Keywords

Emotional resilience, self-awareness, values

2008). Teams that operate in stressful environments are less collaborative and more likely to make mistakes (Business in the Community 2009). Building emotional resilience, therefore, can create healthier workplace cultures, reduce absenteeism, improve teamwork and raise morale.

Resilience training can take different forms. For example, the IT company IBM (Sill 2011) set up the Integrated Health Services organisation for its employees, which involves occupational medicine, health benefits and wellness professionals. The service also runs employee wellbeing programmes that address the changing health and safety needs of the company's staff worldwide.

One of the main features of the IBM programme is that it looks at current and future workplace environments, and therefore emerging rather than historical employee needs (Table 1, page 16).

There are parallels between the workplace environments at IBM and those in the NHS, with staff facing similar challenges. These include stress being part of daily life, and working in rapidly changing environments and within time constraints that often make eating well and proper hydration a low priority for staff. Nursing work environments, and work environments in general, are often stressful, and it could be argued that this will not change. It is therefore important to understand what constitutes stress for us individually, eradicate the things we have control over and become more resilient at dealing with the rest.

Taking this approach shifts the emphasis from avoiding stress towards understanding emotional and physical responses to everyday challenges

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE is a term used to describe individuals' abilities to adapt to various adverse conditions while maintaining a sense of purpose, balance and positive mental and physical wellbeing. We live and work in constantly changing and demanding environments where stress is a fact of life. However, understanding stress and its effect on our emotions and behaviours, and having the tools to deal with it, can create a pathway to resilience.

The NHS Health and Wellbeing Review (Boorman 2009) identified clear links between staff health and wellbeing and three dimensions of service quality: patient safety, patient experience and the effectiveness of patient care.

The psychological effects of everyday stress can be destabilising and, although people may not take time off work, stress can affect their focus, attention to detail, productivity and behaviour (Kuoppala *et al*

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Pictured opposite: newly qualified staff nurses Charlotte Flemming, Anna Kenny and Kath Thurnham (left to right) take part in a preceptorship programme



GREEN

My Strengths Are:
Visioning
Strategy
Process Improvement
Expertise

Values Are:
Intelligence
Edge



Table 1 Comparison of historical attitudes vs present workplace challenges and resultant employee needs to build personal resilience

Historical	Present day	Emerging need
Stress to be avoided	Stress is part of our normal daily life	Stress is expected and planned for with coping strategies
Predictable expectations	Rapidly changing environments	Ability to maintain focus, optimism and composure
Meal and break times are routine and important	Eating well and being hydrated are seen as luxuries	Developing strategies for proper recovery when time allows

(IBM 2011)

to build self-reliance and resilience by making healthier choices.

Preceptorship programme

Feedback was sought from newly registered staff nurses and midwives at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust because turnover in the first year of graduation was found to be high. These staff members were asked how they felt about and coped with the transition from student to staff nurse; they indicated that this transitional period is one of the most stressful points of a nurse's career.

As a result of this feedback, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, developed a preceptorship programme to address the issues raised and support the transition. It involves five days of training and an ongoing mentoring programme to support new nurses and their managers. Developing newly registered nurses' emotional self-awareness and appreciation of others is an important part of the programme.

One of the training days consists of an interactive session centred on three areas:

- Self-awareness and appreciation of others.
- Communication across different personality types.
- Translating personality types into patient care.

The training day aims to help newly registered staff understand:

- Their own values, strengths and needs.
- Their preferred methods of working.
- How to communicate their personal stress and frustrations and how these affect their behaviour.
- How to communicate and relate to others more effectively.
- Their effect on colleagues and patients.

The preceptorship module is based on a personal and team effectiveness interactive programme developed and run by the organisation True Colors. Called the Difference is You, it focuses on building self-awareness, relationships and teamwork.

Over the past 18 months, more than 1,000 trust staff have taken part in the programme, including more than 250 staff and community nurses, and the entire occupational health department. Work is now ongoing with the occupational health department to develop an emotional resilience programme for in-house use initially but with potential to be used outside of the trust. The enhanced programme will build on the experience and feedback from the Difference Is You, but will focus on raising awareness of emotional wellbeing; it will also provide staff with practical strategies for developing resilience that they can use in every aspect of their life, including work.

Building emotional resilience can be one of the most challenging, but also useful and rewarding non-technical skills for newly registered nurses or midwives to develop. The ability to be emotionally resilient is essential to ensuring that new staff undergo a smooth transition from student to competent staff. It is fundamental to being able to meet individual and organisational goals, as well as delivering the best levels of patient care.

The aim of the programme at Guy's and St Thomas' is to strengthen leadership at all levels to recognise and support the experiences that students, newly registered staff and colleagues encounter.

Matron of Guy's and St Thomas' occupational health department Helen Kay took part in the Difference is You programme with her team, which included all clinical and non-clinical staff.

She said: 'I found participation invaluable from both a personal and managerial perspective. The concept is simple, but the outcome phenomenal. It has enabled me to consider my own and my colleagues' characteristics and the variety of ways in which we approach issues, tasks and situations. I believe that, as a result of a greater understanding of myself, I have subtly amended my management approach with considerable benefit.'

After the one-day programme all staff complete a simple qualitative evaluation. Follow-up reviews with managers have demonstrated the programme's effectiveness, with participants reporting better functioning through:

- Increased self-awareness.
- Clear identification and understanding of their own values and needs.
- Increased awareness of their own preferences for working style and environment.
- Appreciation of others' values and needs.
- Improved ability to communicate with others.
- Increased empathy with patients and colleagues.
- Improved relationships with patients and colleagues.

- An ability to identify negative triggers and stressful situations that cause distress and enable healthier coping mechanisms.
- Understanding the impact of negative triggers on physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Increased emotional awareness.
- Greater satisfaction and engagement in the work environment, as shown by better adherence to infection control policies.

Emotional core

A human's core muscles play a vital role in maintaining good posture and balance and preventing injury, and our emotional core plays a similar role in mental wellbeing. At the heart of our emotional core are our values and needs (Reuven Bar-On 2011). Values are the things such as being dependable or competent that are most important to us, while our needs must be in place to be able to honour those values.

It is important to distinguish between values and needs because conversations often focus just on needs, but our values are what give them meaning and purpose. When our core is not strong because our values or our needs are unmet, we move from being committed to becoming disengaged, our emotions become negative and we become distressed rather than content. The effects of this are felt by individuals and by the people with whom they have personal relationships – in the case of nurses, the patients. We all have characteristics that make us unique and that affect how we approach life and handle stress. The ability to recognise individuals' preferences and meet their core values in positive, resourceful ways is essential to maintaining energy and fulfilment at work, as well as in our personal lives.

The comments that follow from newly registered staff nurses who have taken part in the Guy's and St Thomas' preceptorship programme illustrate how their different values and needs resulted in stress. Emotionally aware managers can understand these differences and support a smoother, less stressful and more productive transition.

Staff nurse A 'One day you're a student... we think we have responsibility, but we don't. Two weeks later, I came back as a staff nurse. Now I am expected to know everything and I am the central point of contact for everyone. I don't want to let anyone down or make a mistake.'

Staff nurse B 'There is an assumption that, as a student, you know nothing and, as a nurse, you know everything.'

When people have strong convictions, honour their values and create an environment in which their needs are satisfied, they can be vibrant, their levels of empathy are greater and they can build stronger relationships. To sustain this, people must learn how to replenish themselves.

An example that True Colors often uses in workshops and coaching is to compare a human being with a jug of water.

The jug starts the day full of life-giving liquid, abundant and refreshing; as we progress through the day, we gradually share our water with others until the jug is empty and there is nothing left to give and the energy and vitality that sprang from it have gone.

Guide to emotional resilience

The following section describes how to understand what constitutes a person's emotional resilience and how to replenish it. The guide outlined here is based on six steps (Box 1) that staff are taken through on the emotional resilience programme. The trust's preceptorship programme covers the first two steps and the emotional resilience programme is being developed with the occupational health department.

Emotional resilience affects nurse managers, their patients and the staff they lead, so to maintain a positive and healthy outlook without risking long-term burnout nurse managers must make time to balance stress with opportunities to replenish themselves. To fully understand this, it is helpful if they first understand their own values, needs and strengths and how they respond when these are not met.

Step 1. Develop self-awareness Celebrate who you are and understand your values, needs and strengths; without this you cannot begin to regulate your behaviour and create healthier options to build your resilience. Some examples of values, needs and strengths are given in Table 2 (page 18).

Tip Imagine your best day ever. What made it so good? How do you feel when you think about it? What was happening? Which values were being honoured? What needs were being met and how did

Box 1 Six steps to emotional resilience

- Step 1: Develop self-awareness.
- Step 2: Understand the triggers that create negative emotional responses.
- Step 3: Understand your default behaviour.
- Step 4: Link negative trigger to the value or need.
- Step 5: Create alternative choices.
- Step 6: Observe the change in your behaviour.

Table 2 Examples of values, needs and strengths

Values	Needs	Strengths
Practical skill, spontaneity, independence.	Action, challenge, variety.	Works well in a crisis, multitasks, humour.
Loyalty, dependability, responsibility.	Structure, consistency, rules and procedures.	Organisation, attention to detail, tenacity.
Sensitivity, compassion, authenticity.	Harmony, warm relationships, co-operation.	Communication, empathy, supportive.
Competence, ingenuity, intelligence.	Autonomy, ability to question, space to think.	Creative problem solving, lateral thinking, strategic.

Table 3 Distress triggers and responses

Trigger	Value	Need
Not enough happening.	Taking action.	To be challenged and involved in fixing things.
Last-minute changes.	Being dependable and doing a good job.	Planning and organisation to do the job as well as possible.
Conflict between colleagues.	Mutual respect.	Building positive relationships through good communication.
Ideas being ignored.	Expertise and knowledge.	Ability to demonstrate competence.

you display your strengths? Start to be more mindful of these things, so that you can replicate such days.

Management question Who is like you, who is different, and how do you know? Be observant of how others respond emotionally to you and to the way you lead. Where and when could you adapt your style?

Step 2. Understand the triggers that create negative emotional responses Everyone is different and one person's idea of a productive environment can be another's source of extreme stress.

What causes you stress and frustration? For example, it could be that there is not enough happening, that there are many last-minute changes, that there is conflict between colleagues or that ideas are being ignored.

Tip Improve self-awareness by starting to identify what you can and cannot control. For example, you

cannot control the need for emergency flu wards, but you can control what you ask for to enable you to operate at your optimum.

Improve your empathy by noticing what you share in common with your colleagues and how they are different from you.

Management question How might your management style be stressful for others who are not like you? One newly registered staff nurse said: 'I chose the ward I'm on, not the specialty, because the ward manager ran a tight ship and is really well organised. Some people find that scary and intimidating, but I like the direction and it helps me get organised.'

Step 3. Understand your default behaviour

What happens when you are stressed? How does this affect your behaviour? For example, do you disengage, become 'a martyr', get upset or do you become condescending and dismissive?

Tip What kind of situations do you find most stressful? Listen to your body; it is a good indicator of when you are ill at ease with something. Is it a relationship, or an environmental, physical or mental issue? Is it caused by something that has happened before that you have not had to deal with?

Management question What kind of manager do you become under stress?

- Punitive: 'My way or the highway?'
- Smothering: 'If you want something done properly, do it yourself?'
- Doormat: 'Anything you say?'
- Rebel: 'I don't care what you say?'

Notice how others respond to you in these different modes.

Step 4. Link the negative trigger to the value or need

When you can recognise the cause of your distress and understand which of your values and needs are affected, you can start to create different strategies to deal with the stress. This enables you to start thinking about more positive behavioural choices. Some examples are given in Table 3.

Tip Focus on what you want to have and who you want to be rather than on what you do not have. If you have a conversation about being stressed, you will often end up being more stressed. If you focus on what you want to achieve instead, you will have acknowledged yourself and, as a result, start to feel less stressed.

For example, having a conversation about 'I hate last-minute changes' reminds you how stressful it is,

but a conversation about 'I want to do my very best, and planning and organisation helps me do that' moves you towards a mutually beneficial solution.

How do planning and organisation help you manage those changes? What do you want others to do and what can you do yourself?

Management question What do your team and colleagues need to support their values in the workplace? How can you help your staff identify the unmet need? If it is not clear, ask them what they need from you. Acknowledging what they need can be a powerful motivator because the person receiving the acknowledgment feels both seen and heard. It is a great way to build your emotional intelligence.

Step 5. Create alternative choices This is about reframing negative thoughts and ideas and seeing more positive outcomes for you and others. The idea is to link this feeling back to one of your values, so that the purpose for change has a personal motive.

Tip If you start the behavioural action with 'I should...' it will never happen because this phrase is often followed by 'or else', which is not particularly motivating. However, if you can change it to 'I want to do... because', and the 'because' is attached to one of your values, you are more likely to succeed. Try it with regard to giving up smoking, taking more exercise or simply bringing lunch to work, for example, so you do not miss out on food during a hectic day.

Management question With staff feedback, try to step into their shoes. What do you think drives their behaviour? Ask them what they need to be more successful or have a more positive outcome. Ask what value or need is not being met. This way, you will get to the root cause and can help them generate new behaviours.

Step 6. Observe the change in your behaviour As you put new behaviours into place, connect with those feelings and observe the effects on yourself and others. The more positive feedback you receive,

the more you are likely to adopt the new habit. This is mindfulness in action and, over time, your emotional resilience and general health will improve.

Tip Think back to your best day ever. Are you reinforcing those feelings? Set time aside to reflect every day.

Management question Take time to reflect with your staff on what went well and why it felt good. Reinforce the positives and benefits. Observe the differences in the team and the effect on them and the patients.

Conclusion

Many of the staff who took the preceptorship module asked if they could have more development with their teams to understand each other's behaviours and what affects them, create strategies to prevent burnout and learn how to tackle stress.

Following the simple steps above can help staff to start this process. These steps should be practised each day to help staff begin to create new habits. Developing emotional resilience is something for which everyone must take personal ownership. It affects every part of our lives and is integral to personal success and long-term emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.

As a nursing manager, begin an interactive training programme that will allow staff to validate their values and needs, and share them with others.

More information

Visit www.truecolorsuk.com to develop emotional intelligence and resilience programmes

Further reading

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Conflict of interest
None declared

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