

Long-term impact

NHS Practitioner Health

NHS Practitioner Health (PH) is a free self-referral, confidential CQC rated “outstanding” service for health and social care professionals (HCPs) who suffer with mental health and addiction issues. First established as a small pilot in 2008, when it was recognised that those in healthcare can struggle to access mental health treatment due to confidentiality concerns, stigma, and fear of impact on their career and professional life. Initially only accessible to doctors and dentists in London, this organisation has grown to provide national services to healthcare professionals in England and Scotland. The multi-disciplinary service is led by general practitioners, with staff including psychiatrists, mental health professionals, administrative and management.

Around 100 practitioners deliver assessments, pharmacotherapy, individual and group psychotherapy, case management and support to return to work or training. Over 15 years PH has treated more than 25000 practitioners and has become the largest publicly funded provider of its kind globally.

NHS Practitioner Health (PH) is a confidential, free self-referral, CQC rated “outstanding” service for health and social care Professionals (HCPs) in England and Scotland with mental health and addiction problems. The service was started in London in 2008 and has since expanded across UK. We recognise the significant barriers HCPs have when needing care including fears around confidentiality, stigma, of regulatory involvement and detrimental impact on their careers. The multi-disciplinary service is led by general practitioners, with the team including psychiatrists, mental health nurses, therapists, social workers, administrative and management. Around 100 practitioners deliver assessments, pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy, case management and support to return to work or training. Following rapid expansion in 2020 as a result of overwhelming need brought about by the pandemic, PH has now treated over 25000 practitioners and is the largest publicly funded provider of its kind globally. PH has proven significant impact in terms of improvement in mental health.

At registration 25% of patients are out of work; we succeed in getting 84% back to work/training within 6 months. PH takes a holistic tailored approach recognising that mental health and addiction concerns are often linked to professional issues, how their condition might impact on their work and potentially their own patients, and the

interface between their role as patient and their identity as a carer. We treat patients with talking therapies, case management and/or medication. PH has set up memorandums of understanding with health and social care regulators to ensure professionals are able to access confidential care, without the threat of regulatory intervention.

PH provides comprehensive, holistic, confidential, multidisciplinary, and proactive support to HCPs in England and Scotland. We have also established arrangements for clinicians in Guernsey, Jersey, and Isle of Man to access confidential care. The service was created because it is well recognised that HCPs have difficulty in accessing confidential care, particularly in relation to mental health and addiction difficulties due to the stigma involved and potential repercussions for their professional lives and careers. Confidentiality is the backbone of our service – we are not connected to the NHS spine and do not share information with other healthcare providers or third parties without the consent of the patient to do so unless there are exceptional circumstances. In feedback 95.4% of our patients describe the service as highly confidential.

To do this, we have set up memorandums of understanding with the full range of health and social care regulators as the majority of our patient group are in regulated professions. This means that we can offer a confidential service to our patients within defined and agreed parameters with the regulators and our patients can have confidence that their assessment and treatment will remain confidential. Since setting up as a pilot programme in 2008, the service has proven its importance and significance to improving the mental health and wellbeing of its patient population. This is reflected in the fact that in 2008, we were only accessible to doctors and dentists in the London area.

In 2015 we were then commissioned to provide the Trainee Doctors and Dentists Support Service which provides support and psychoeducation to trainee doctors in London and the Southeast. In 2017 we were then commissioned to provide services across England so that any General Practitioner could access us. In 2019, we opened access to all doctors and dentists across England and by 2021, to all the English health workforce and the Scottish regulated workforce. Since 2008, PH has treated over 25,000 practitioners including doctors, dentists, nurses and other HCPs.

The numbers of patients accessing us has increased; 5000 patients were seen in the first 10 years of the service and we are now seeing approximately 6000 new patients per year. We have managed to accommodate this significant increase in patient numbers with no increase in funding and without jeopardising our outcomes and feedback. 94% of patients demonstrate improvement to recovery, using

independent and standardised measures. 80% suffer from anxiety/depression, 10% addiction issues (mainly alcohol) and 10% a mix of other problems, including relating to work and/or regulator, moral injury, complex physical problems impacting on mental health.

We recognise there are hard to reach groups and have developed unique interventions for:

- International medical graduates who are often socially isolated and unfamiliar with the specific challenges of working in the UK and the NHS,
- For parents who have children with complex needs
- LGBTQ+, we run groups, webinars and reach out to subgroups, such as those from Muslim community.
- Those undergoing medicolegal issues.
- Those with neurodiverse problems, including autism.
- Female doctors (they have additional needs and high rates of suicide).

During the pandemic, 80% of new registrations were women.

In addition to treatment of mental health and addiction issues, we also proactively provide a huge amount of psychoeducation including workshops, written articles, groups, webinars, podcasts and lectures, both nationally and internationally. We engage with the media regularly to promote the importance of the issue of mental health amongst healthcare professionals. As well as expanding treatment services over the Coronavirus Pandemic, PH also provided a range of free resources to the workforce, aimed at helping manage their mental health and wellbeing.

These covered a range of topics including stress management, mindfulness, building resilience, alcohol consumption, and sleep issues. During the pandemic the organisation ran around 1000 remote events in that regard. Many of these included safe spaces for staff to meet, connect and share their experiences and offer each other peer support. We used a combination of virtual large and small groups, webinars, educational and topic specific events and podcasts. The majority of these were open access: you did not need to be registered with the service, nor be a doctor, nor be located anywhere specific.

We offered:

- Virtual common rooms throughout the day and into evenings/weekends which provided a confidential space for any health professional to take part in

informal chat and could reflect and support one another. Each common room was facilitated by trained hosts to help guide the discussion and signpost attendees to other offers of help or support.

- A series of webinars entitled 'Caring During COVID – Caring for You' which were led by wellbeing experts and provided a platform to enhance the wellbeing of NHS staff. Monthly themes were tailored to reflect topical issues and concerns of the healthcare professionals presenting to the service.
- Newsletter: in 2020 we introduced our monthly newsletter which shared topics related to staff wellbeing, posting invitations to our events and a monthly blog which outlined the latest issues facing the NHS, patients, healthcare workers and our service.
- Support and resources: we provided a dedicated webpage on our website with links to offers of external support and resources.
- Joint working: in July 2020, we held a free virtual conference "The Wounded Healer" in collaboration with the British Medical Association. We also worked with the charity, Doctors in Distress, to provide online groups for doctors with long COVID and a separate one for 'Black Medics', a group for doctors who identify themselves as being of Black Afro-Caribbean origin and during the pandemic worked with BAPIO to support doctors who had been stranded in UK and could not return to their own country of origin.
- Wellbeing app: we launched this app specifically aimed at the needs of healthcare professionals. It enabled users to create individualised wellbeing plans, access tailored articles, tools and resources that were linked to the wellbeing needs identified.
- Peer support: we organised a cadre of peer supporters who were later career and retired General Practitioners so that they could provide a listening ear and support to staff throughout the pandemic.

We are a CQC "outstanding" rated organisation.

Prior to the establishment of our service in 2008, it was unusual for doctors to attend for care when mentally unwell. They would 'rather' suffer in silence or seek informal care through friends, family or typically, unstructured 'corridor' consultations. Our service set out to deal with this through embedding the service within a relatively non-stigmatising, normalising general practice, self-referral, setting. 80% suffer from anxiety/depression, 10% addiction issues (mainly alcohol) and 10% a mix of other

problems, including relating to work and/or regulator, moral injury, complex physical problems impacting on mental health.

Over time these ratios have changed whereby in earlier years we saw more complex, long-standing issues with many people who had run into difficulties or where undergoing complaints or investigations. The longer the service exists, the more people know about it and trust it, leading to them seeking help earlier and needing less costly interventions.

We are a trusted and respected service – which can deal with the most complex, the most anxious (in terms of fears around confidentiality) and those from the start of their careers to the those in the most senior roles in health care. We communicate widely: During the pandemic ran around 1000 remote events and regularly teach, training, speak, write, and engage with the media about the issue of mental health amongst health care professionals.

On a biennial basis we hold an international conference “The Wounded Healer” which brings together researchers, academics and practitioners in the field of healthcare staff wellbeing to share and learn from one another. PH has published a wide range of mental health wellbeing material including, articles, a podcast series and regularly lectures employers and organisations both nationally and internationally about these issues.

The numbers of patients accessing us has increased significantly over the years; 5000 patients seen in the first 10 years and now 6000 per year, equivalent to around 5% of the medical workforce in England. Since 2008 around 20% (1 in 5) of the medical workforce will have accessed the service. Outcomes are very positive with approximately 94% of patients improving to recovery on independent and standardised measures.

Patients also report favourably on their ability to continue in work or training following treatment with the service. Over two thirds of those who had planned to leave the NHS or care sector at the time of registering with the service report that their treatment with PH has impacted favourably on their decision to stay in work. In real terms this is around 600 people per year who choose to remain in work as a result of their care. With estimates of around £230,000 to train a doctor the cost of new training posts if these people had chosen to leave would be approximately £138m per year.

‘If you build it, they will come’; and they have in large numbers, with the 25000th patient registering in Feb 2023. PH has been in operation since 2008 and has grown hugely since. Initially the service was only accessible by doctors and dentists in the

London area, then to all GPs in England in 2016 and in 2019 to all HCPs in England who may not be able to access mental health and addiction care due to confidentiality issues.

PH also runs the Scottish workforce Service since 2020 which supports and treats any regulated health and social care professional in Scotland. With the onset of the pandemic, the numbers accessing this service increased dramatically with nearly 5000 new presentations in the pandemic year (March 2020 – March 2021), exceeding the number presenting to us in the first decade of operation, most suffering with anxiety, depression, and burnout. Since 2021, we have supported the national staff mental health and wellbeing hubs with set up, training, and accepting referrals for patients who cannot access confidential care locally. No other organisation in the UK operates in this way.

The numbers presenting to PH continues to rise, with around 500-600 new presentations per month and despite this, it has managed to consistently maintain excellent outcomes with respect to:

- Improvements in patients' mental health and social functioning
- Our recovery rates are that 94% of patients with depression and 93% with anxiety improve significantly based on independent and standardised measures, regardless of age, or gender.
- Numbers returning to work or training. At discharge, approximately 84% of those not at work at registration, returned to work.
- Satisfaction scores and feedback is overwhelmingly positive with many patients commenting that the service has either changed or saved their lives and careers.
- Over 93% of patients were likely or extremely likely to recommend the service to friends or family, and over 90% stating PH had had a positive or very positive impact on personal wellbeing.
- Abstinence rates for those with addictions. Historically, 70% of our patients remain abstinent from alcohol/drug misuse once achieved, compared to 20-30% in community services.

These numbers have remained consistent or improving over the last seven years since our expansion to a national service. We can provide published, validated data as evidence of our excellent outcomes and feedback received from patients about the service.