

# PRESS RELEASE

## **85% of doctors have experienced mental health issues, reveals Medical Protection survey**

**A Medical Protection survey of more than 600 UK members reveals that 85% have experienced mental health issues, with common issues being stress (75%), anxiety (49%) and low self-esteem (36%).<sup>1</sup> A third of respondents (32%) have had depression during their medical career, while one in 10 (13%) stated they had experienced suicidal feelings.**

Of those who had experienced mental health issues, they cited heavy workload (76%) and long working hours (70%) as factors that had a high or moderate impact on their mental health. Additionally, high levels of regulation and scrutiny affected half (54%) of respondents' mental health, and experience of a negligence claim had an impact on a quarter (24%) of them.

The effect on their professional life is striking as 60% believe their mental health issues had an impact on their concentration and 36% felt it impacted on their empathy towards patients. Forty one per cent of those affected did not discuss their issues with anyone, with 58% of those believing they did not need support, and a quarter (24%) feeling there is a stigma attached to mental health issues.

### **Dr Pallavi Bradshaw, Senior Medicolegal adviser at Medical Protection said:**

"Being a doctor is not only physically and intellectually demanding, but also emotionally draining. Doctors have to make difficult decisions daily, alongside rising patient expectations and fewer resources. These challenges are impacting on doctors' emotional health, and yet so few are seeking support – in some cases due to the perceived stigma attached to mental health issues.

"Doctors help their patients with mental health problems but they often suffer alone. The experience can be isolating and can have a negative impact on professional confidence. Medical Protection urges colleagues of doctors to look out for signs of mental health problems and offer support, such as talking through issues or helping to balance their workload.

"It is important that doctors know that seeking help will not automatically lead to a referral to the General Medical Council or put their careers at risk. Colleagues should provide support to those who may be vulnerable and in the interests of providing the best care to their patients; doctors must seek help as soon as they experience mental health difficulties."

### **Case study – Dr S**

"It started when a close family member became very ill, and the stress and anxiety caused by the situation, coupled with my demanding NHS role, got on top of me. I spoke to the occupational health service and my GP, and it was decided I should take time off work as I wasn't in a good state to see patients.

"Following a month's absence – my first in nearly 25 years of service – I felt unsupported by colleagues, who were not sympathetic to what I had been going through. I felt guilty, believing that I had let down the team, and I started to suffer from low self-esteem and sleep disturbance.

"Colleagues no longer look out for each other the way they once did. In the past, colleagues and management would offer help to those who might be struggling. Now, it's not a comfortable environment to speak openly.

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“Doctors are expected to put their personal feelings aside, and continue treating others. Sometimes it feels like we need permission to be human.”

## **ENDS**

For further information or to arrange an interview with Dr Pallavi Bradshaw and/or Dr S (who is available for radio and print interviews but wishes to remain anonymous) please contact Rajiv Pattni, Press Officer at MPS on +44 (0) 207 399 1409 or email [Rajiv.Pattni@medicalprotection.org](mailto:Rajiv.Pattni@medicalprotection.org)

## **Notes to editors**

1. Medical Protection conducted a survey of members across all medical specialties, including General Medicine, Surgical specialties and Anaesthetics, to find out their personal experiences of mental health issues. The survey ran from 18 June to 3 July 2015 and received 631 responses.
2. Dr Pallavi Bradshaw is a senior medicolegal adviser at Medical Protection. She graduated from St Catharine's College, Cambridge, gaining a BA (Hons) with a dissertation in Medical Law and Ethics. She trained at Addenbrooke's Hospital and graduated from the clinical school in December 2001.