

Setting up the Staff Wellbeing Hub.....

I remember a day in early 2020 when we were launching some regional training for major incidents with the irony that our emergency planners were called away for urgent covid preparations. That was just prior to the tipping point that sent our country into lockdown. Of course, the training touched on epidemics but as we moved into the pandemic it quickly became apparent that we needed to scale up the information and support options on that. One of the key learnings from other mass casualty events is always to be prepared for the unexpected. Responding to the unique circumstances of each collective trauma requires agile mobilisation that is tailored to the situation. Our region's Integrated Care System were very proactive in supporting what could be done at scale for staff so that when funding for the Staff Wellbeing Hub's arrived, we could respond quickly. We managed to commandeer a small core group of staff at short notice to enable our Hub to be up and running in a month. What a feat that was! Myself (currently Clinical Director), Lyn Williams (currently Outreach Lead), Paras Patel (Research Lead) and Claire Chapman (Clinical Manager) got things moving for the set up in Jan 2021 and still remain with the hub. It has been a most rewarding and innovative journey.

The hub offer has been varied and emergent. Half of the money was devolved to local provider Trusts for their own internal staff support offer. The hub was fortunate to have had a regional support line set up by one of the mental health trusts during covid that we could use as our 'front door'. It remains vitally important to us that staff are met quickly as colleagues and peers. Our experienced members of staff start with a conversation and may then offer advice, support, training, signposting or treatment. We have a broad range of evidence based therapies for people or teams whose needs cannot be met elsewhere, particularly where they are bereft, traumatised, emotionally exhausted or have specific mental health problems, eg insomnia. This rapidity and level of intervention gives the Hub amazing clinical outcomes to keep people working and living well.

Our partnership with the wellbeing informatics team at Northumbria University has been fruitful in developing a real time method of mapping wellbeing needs. Our diary is also a great and non-stigmatising way of staff monitoring their own wellbeing over time. We are learning a lot from that research, for example, the importance of compassion in preventing burnout. Currently we are learning wisdom of recovery from staff who, sadly, have tried to take their own life in the past. The documentary about this will be finished by the summer and we hope this will engender hope in those staff currently struggling with that. You are not alone.

Our patch has amazing third sector and arts organisations and consultants that partner with us to offer staff ways of preventing burnout and distress and helping staff to function well at work. Staff have been able to access coaching for maintaining an NHS career. Collective healing too has been an important part of our Hub to the extent that revered composer Sir Nigel Osborne and music maestro Sting got behind these events! We also gained extra funds to support homeworkers with the inactivity and isolation that comes along with that. Maybe you tried one of the e-bikes?

The Hub has attracted compassionate, expert and motivated staff, despite wider workforce/recruitment pressures. The funds NHS England has given have enabled our Hub staff and our local 'spokes' to support over seventeen thousand of you. We are seeing more of you each month, with the number of staff accessing the Hub doubling in the last six months. You let us know what a difference we have made to you, how much you feel listened to and have a way forward, including having a reduction in symptoms that are important to you or getting back to work. We are in awe of the work that staff in health and social care do and it is a privilege to work together towards cultures of wellbeing that align with the original values of cultural compassion that underpin our health and care system. **Written by Dr Angela Kennedy, February 2023**