



# CAREERS

BMJ: first published as 10.1136/bmj.m1264 on 6 April 2020. Downloaded from <http://www.bmj.com/> on 30 April 2020 by guest. Protected by copyright.

## Supporting colleagues during covid-19: the intensive care consultant

Emma Wheatley, an intensive care medicine and anaesthesia consultant in Bolton, tells **Adrian O'Dowd** why it's important to support colleagues so they can perform at their peak

**Adrian O'Dowd**

London, UK

Any clinician who has ever felt unsupported could do no better than work with Emma Wheatley to boost their confidence and satisfaction in the workplace. As well as being a qualified coach and mentor she has been appointed a BMA wellbeing adviser and is the wellbeing lead for her department at Bolton NHS Foundation Trust.

She says that while covid-19 is a growing challenge her trust is prepared and will fully support its staff. "At the moment, where I work, we aren't too overwhelmed. We're doing lots of training so that when we do get more cases, everybody knows what they're dealing with."

She adds, "Most of my time at work is spent training people and supporting them. I've also been putting together some wellbeing packages so that I can give staff who end up working longer hours snacks and access to showers before they go home. We are as prepared as we can be."

Wheatley, who qualified in 1988 from the University of Leeds, clearly loves her specialty. "What gives me the most pleasure in my job is seeing patients improve or ensuring that they remain comfortable even if we can't get them better—being able to offer them that support," she says.

Wheatley is keen to promote patient safety and she set up her trust's human factors training programme which seeks to learn why things go wrong, what can be done to prevent errors, and why individuals should not be blamed.

Wheatley says she doesn't think that anybody can achieve their best unless they are in their best frame of mind and have good teamwork. "Through my human factors training, I promote people working together well and supporting each other," she says.

Wheatley and colleagues also set up a keeping everyone safe and supported (KESS) group which offers peer support to staff who have been involved in a clinical incident. KESS provides a safe, confidential space to discuss the incident. "If something

happens, it can be soul destroying—not only for the patient and relatives, but also for the healthcare professional that has been involved," she says.

"We made this peer support group so that people could talk to each other and try to rationalise what had happened to help them get through it. We've had a lot of people come for support and had some really good feedback from the group. People really value that support from somebody who understands what's happened."

Looking forward, her advice for young doctors is clear. "Make sure that you find somebody you can talk to, whether that's somebody who supervises your education or a coach or mentor to help you get through difficult times," she says. "Also, make sure you have some proper downtime."

### Nominated by Amy Hobbs

"Emma embodies a role model in the fullest sense. She is someone I aspire to be like and someone who inspires me to be more compassionate, more supportive, and more kind.

"Emma is a well respected intensive care consultant who champions patient safety—but she has also made it her mission to support and mentor her colleagues. Whether that's staff members who need a friendly ear after being involved in a difficult situation or patients and their families, Emma communicates with great empathy.

"She is hardworking, determined to go the extra mile, and is a tower of strength, providing wisdom and moral support for all problems, clinical, professional, and personal. She does all this with incredible warmth and poise.

"She is an absolute unsung heroine."

Amy Hobbs is a consultant anaesthetist and paediatric lead for anaesthetics

Nominate a role model: to nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to [arimmer@bmj.com](mailto:arimmer@bmj.com)

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