

# **EAPH Conference 2013 - Dublin**

## **The Deeper Aspects of Doctors' Health and Well-Being**

**A Workshop by Dr. Deirdre Kinlen**

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### **A. Outline of Workshop**

**Introduction/Aim:** This workshop aims firstly to explore the deeper aspects of doctors' health and well-being which may impinge on their ability to relate to their patients and facilitate their healing. Secondly it aims to elicit areas of undergraduate and postgraduate training where such aspects of their health may be attended to. Thirdly it looks at what supports and structures could be put in place and what doctors might do to enrich their health and well-being during their years of medical practice.

**Method and Results:** The workshop is based on hermeneutical research, carried out on literature mainly from medical and psychological sources. Authors include Michael Kearney, Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig and others.

1. Holistic self-care by doctors includes physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual self-care. Of these, spiritual care and development is largely omitted from medical school curricula with some noted recent exceptions.
2. Compassionate self-awareness of one's personality traits, strengths and weaknesses is important for anyone in a listening/ therapeutic relationship. However, self-awareness is omitted from most medical school curricula, in contrast to the training of others in listening professions, for example of psychotherapists.
3. The doctor who acts as 'container' for the suffering of patients, needs support and containment. Yet most doctors do not have structured support or supervision.
4. Reflective practice and preparedness to embark on an inner journey would enrich the doctor's deeper development. Help might be needed for the process.

### **Discussion**

The participants were asked the following three questions:

1. How would you structure listening support for doctors?
2. Which reflective practice appeals to you? If possible give a reason for your choice.
3. How would you design a scheme to promote your deeper health and well-being?

## **B. Outcome of Workshop Discussion**

### **1. Regarding Listening Support for Doctors**

There was enthusiasm for the idea of setting up listening support for doctors.

- Such support could be preventative, a regular part of good practice, as well as providing care after problems have arisen
- Importance of a normalising/ non-pathologising/ nonjudgmental approach
- Respect for confidentiality and boundaries
- The focus would be on the doctor's feelings in the patient-doctor relationship
- Various structures suggested included one-to-one counselling, local doctor groups, external facilitators, *Balint* groups
- Listening support would be mandatory, with protected time
- Listening support would commence in medical school.

### **2. Regarding Reflective Practice**

Different people favoured different options, including mindfulness, meditation, movement practices and free-flowing, reflective journaling.

### **3. Regarding a Scheme to Promote One's Deeper Health and Well-Being**

The group mainly focused on a programme for undergraduates (citing a scheme in New Zealand)

- Choice of a scheme would be personal
- Personal issues would emerge
- Students could email questions to be discussed in the group (less threatening than asking in front of their peers)
- Literature, including poetry and novels, could be an entry point.