

April 2021 to
March 2022

Dr Colleen Wylie



I embarked on this fellowship, fairly unsure about what I was taking on. Being new to Wessex and relatively new to General Practice, I was hoping to network, meet others, learn new skills, find new opportunities that were interesting and challenging, and have a day of work once a week that complemented my two days in practice and was flexible with my busy, chaotic family life. What I've taken from this fellowship, a year on, is much more than I could have imagined.

My Achievements:

- Our Joint Project - "What do the Hidden Half think?"
- My Solo Project - "Dear Wessex GP.... How are you?"
- A taster into Quality Assurance work for Appraisers
- An insight and understanding into how the Wessex Appraisal Service operates
- Attending conferences
- Our joint project being presented on posters at FMLM and RCGP conferences
- Joining the Wessex Patient Safety Course Faculty
- Winning a Triathlon
- Hugely expanding my IT skills
- Becoming part of a brilliant team
- Studying for my Diploma in Lifestyle Medicine



Dear Wessex GP... How are you?

I have always been interested in the wellbeing of our workforce. I did hospital medicine for a number of years before re-training as a GP. I always enjoyed the pastoral element of working with junior colleagues. When I became a GP Registrar, it struck me that trainees with less work and life experience than me were expected to practice in such an independent way. Once we have received our CCTs as GPs, we work in such an isolated manner compared to other medical specialties. It can be daunting and lonely. The amount of pastoral care or mentoring and support available to GPs is so variable and dependent on the practice. With GPs under so much pressure, it's hard to have the time and headspace to support our colleagues. When I was struggling with my wellbeing juggling GP work and three very small children, I felt lucky to be able to discuss my concerns with my GP husband, my Problem Based Small Group Learning group, my parents, and at events run by Wessex LMC. I felt supported and that enabled me to make changes. I was keen to explore the wellbeing of our local GPs and what factors were having a negative impact on their wellbeing.

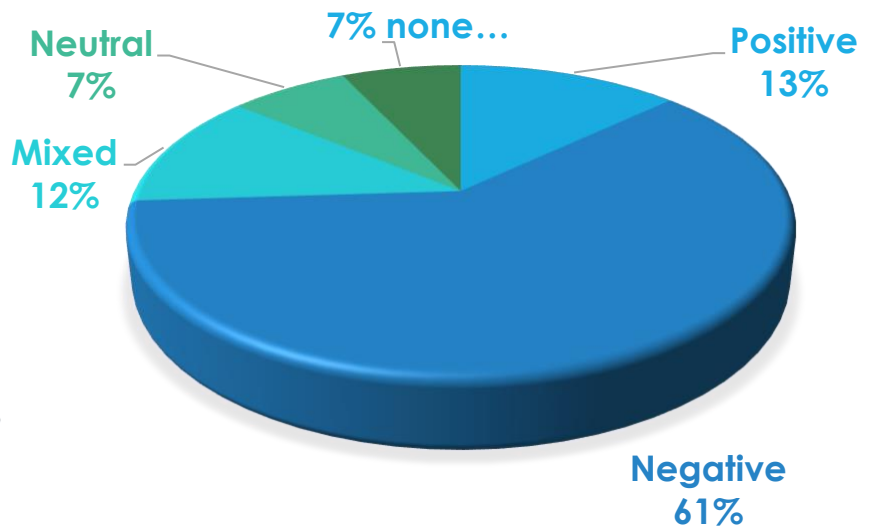
I also had ideas about how appraisal could be a way for appraisers to identify GPs with poor wellbeing and find ways to support them.

I spent the first couple of months having no idea how to change my thoughts into action. I was quite pleased to be able to focus on our group project and bury my head in the sand about my lack of experience in designing research projects, my poor understanding of qualitative research, and my terrible IT skills. With a great deal of support, education and encouragement from Dr Susi Caesar during multiple 1:1 meetings, I started collecting data from the "Personal and Professional Wellbeing" section of completed appraisals. I found the reading of the comments on wellbeing fascinating. Gradually, a research project started taking shape. I met with Sam Scallan, which was invaluable. I started defining research questions and I was off. I read 100 appraisal summaries from April/May 2021. I collected the numeric data from the "On a Scale of 1-10, How are you?" question and I collected qualitative data from the comments on wellbeing section, the appraisal discussion, and the agreed PDP section. So what have I found?

Key Results:

- The most common numeric score to the "How are you?" question was 8/10.
- There was a surprising discordance between the numeric score and the comments on wellbeing. 50% of the GPs that scored 8/10 wrote only negative comments about their wellbeing. 20% who scored 8/10 wrote a mixture of negative and positive comments on their wellbeing.
- Of the 100 appraisals I read, the majority of appraisees wrote about their wellbeing negatively - see the pie chart on the next page.
- The most common negative theme mentioned was "workload".
- 14% said they were unable to look after their own wellbeing.
- 9% had decreased the number of clinical GP sessions per week worked in the last year.
- 12% plan to imminently decrease the number of clinical GP sessions they work in a week.
- On a more positive note, 50% of GPs mentioned some kind of self care.
- The most commonly mentioned self care was exercise, of which running was most popular.

Comments on your Wellbeing



Some samples of negative quotes in the wellbeing section.....

- Meeting demands and workload makes me feel at capacity
- Work encroaches on my headspace most of the time
- Fatigued by increased workload
- Scared and overwhelmed, too many patients
- Work is long and exhausting, I felt isolated at work
- Most challenging year of my career, a lot of stress, a lack of sleep
- Childcare - "juggling", "strain", "stressful"
- "Crushing workload"
- "Pressure cooker"
- "Dreary"



The Most Common Negative Themes Affecting Wellbeing

The most common self-care themes



Conclusions:

My documentary analysis of GP wellbeing based on appraisal documentation has demonstrated that the majority of GPs wrote negatively about their wellbeing. Workload, workforce and managing family life or childcare alongside work were the factors most commonly cited as having a negative impact.

50% of GPs described some form of self-care. There is evidence of wellbeing being discussed by appraisers in the appraisal summary as well as appraisers signposting to support. There is also evidence of wellbeing intervention being mentioned in the agreed PDP. However this seems relatively infrequent. This is to be analysed further.

What I've learnt . . .

I have learnt many new skills from both my solo project and my group project. For me to be able to use Excel spreadsheets, create Word clouds, and make tables is a significant improvement in my IT skills. I have an understanding of qualitative research, defining research questions, thematic analysis, and insight into GP wellbeing across Wessex. There is so much more to learn but I am very proud of how far I have come.

In addition to the learning from my project work, the opportunity arose to join the Patient Safety Faculty and teach the GP Wessex Patient Safety Course to trainee GPs.

Due to me working from home and the flexibility to this role, for the first time in five years, I have a day a week in my house without my children and with peace and quiet(!) I have used this to my advantage, doing my running and cycling training in the daylight instead of cramming it in to the dark evenings. This has been a wonderful bonus and I was very proud to win my triathlon I competed in in 2021.

Our Joint Project ...What Do the Hidden Half think?

It was such a privilege doing a [group project](#) with the other three appraisal fellows. I learnt so much from them and it was wonderful to overcome the challenges of working remotely and using each others' strengths to work together. A highlight of my year was being able to spend a few days together in person - the four of us and Susi - at the Faculty of Medical Leadership and Management Conference. I have attached our [poster](#) that we presented at the two conferences to summarise our research and findings.

The Pillars of Lifestyle Medicine:

Healthy Eating

Mental Wellbeing

Healthy Relationships

Physical Activity

Minimising Harmful Substances

Sleep

The Diploma in Lifestyle Medicine

I have used the majority of my study budget to gain my diploma in Lifestyle medicine. I am studying for it currently. I will attend the British Society of Lifestyle Medicine Conference in September 2022 and sit my diploma exams this Winter. I am getting a lot of satisfaction in learning how to combine my passion of healthy living with general practice and how I can play my part in making our population of patients healthier through lifestyle changes but also our own workforce.

My Journey Continues

I am very grateful for the extension to my fellowship. I have plenty more data to analyse. I am going to look more specifically at whether the GPs with negative wellbeing comments are being signposted to support and/or addressing wellbeing issues in their PDP. I am also keen to explore if my work can be useful locally for workforce planning. I have also submitted an abstract for my solo project to the RCGP/WONCA conference. Regardless of whether my abstract is accepted, thanks to this fellowship programme, I am attending the conference which will be another fantastic learning experience. I intend to write up my findings more formally. I will also be continuing with my diploma and competing in a longer distance triathlon.

Many thanks to:

- Dr Susi Caesar for mentoring me
- Dr Sam Scallan for helping with my research methods
- The other fellows for being such a fabulous team
- Jools Mumford and Gill Watson for their administrative support
- St Paul's Surgery, Winchester, for supporting me to be able to do this role
- HEE(Wessex) for this opportunity

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