

Measuring Professional Wellbeing in Healthcare

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SUMMARY

Wellbeing of healthcare staff has been highlighted as a key issue across clinical professions and a focus on professional wellbeing allows us to identify and better understand the system performance shaping factors that affect individual clinicians and ultimately patient care. This paper describes the method of selecting and applying a validated wellbeing tool in a large acute NHS hospital trust as part of a wider project looking at system monitoring tools.

KEYWORDS

Professional wellbeing, healthcare, system monitoring

Introduction

Multiple reports in recent years have identified clinician burnout as a major concern for healthcare systems. In 2012, The Kings Fund (2012) reported that ‘NHS boards should value patient and staff engagement and pay attention to staff health and wellbeing’. The General Medical Council’s National Trainee Survey (2023) identified that nearly a quarter of trainees are now measured to be at high risk of burnout and that ‘the strain on the UK health system is undoubtedly impacting on doctors’. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, as healthcare organisations struggle to respond to the backlog of work, recruit and retain staff and implement new ways of working and new technologies, there is an increasing interest in taking a proactive approach to improving clinician wellbeing and preventing burnout (Kinman et al, 2023).

Improving wellbeing has often been associated with strategies that help individual’s cope more effectively with the challenges they face at work and that support the development of individual resilience and coping mechanisms (Kinman et al, 2023). Human Factors, with its focus on user-centred design and a systems approach, provides a strong framework to identify work system factors and organisational interventions that can improve clinician wellbeing at an organisational rather than individual level (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019).

In a recent work system review of the Out-of-hours service provided by the Hospital24 (H24) team at one NHS Hospital Trust (Carman et al., 2022), professional wellbeing was identified as an essential component for a systems monitoring tool. Professional wellbeing is related to the broader concept of psychological wellbeing that includes life and non-work sources of satisfaction. Professional wellbeing more specifically relates to the organisational and work system factors that affect an individual (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). This paper focuses on one element of a larger project aimed at identifying the relevant concepts for assessing professional wellbeing. To work towards this aim, the project objectives included the selection of an appropriate tool and capturing a “snapshot” of professional wellbeing within the H24 service.

Method

To identify and select an appropriate tool to measure professional wellbeing within the UK setting, a narrative literature was undertaken. The literature review identified nine factors that were used in an option appraisal exercise to select the tool for the project. These included psychometric properties, construct validity, face validity, suitability, use in healthcare, translation, administration, scoring and interpretations, and terms of use. Four wellbeing tools were identified for the option appraisal exercise: the General Health Questionnaire 12 (Hystad & Johnson, 2020), the World Health Organisation- Five Well-Being Index (Topp, Østergaard, Søndergaard, & Bech, 2015), the Abbreviated Maslach Tool (Worley, Vassar, Wheeler, & Barnes, 2008) and Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) (Leiter & Maslach, 2000).

AWS¹ tool was selected through the option appraisal exercise that included Quality Improvement and Human Factors Leads and Fellows. Each tool was assessed against the 9 categories and through discussion, a consensus was reached that AWS was sufficiently in depth to meet the project aim of capturing a snapshot of professional wellbeing. Additionally, there was a good evidence base for its efficacy, and it supported the identification of factors that contributed to burnout including system issues. The AWS produces a profile of scores to identify key areas of strength or weakness in the organisational setting and includes workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values.

To administer the AWS, 50 licences were purchased, and local ethical and information governance reviews were undertaken. The survey was administered online using Microsoft Forms and participants were recruited through email lists and by advertising by “word of mouth” of those working in the service. Doctors in training (foundation doctor 1 – senior registrars), H24 nurse co-ordinators and clinical support workers in the H24 service were invited to participate over a period from 28th July 2023 to 24th October 2023. The survey was analysed for the entire sample and then individually for the five different staff groups.

Findings

A total of 49 responses were received and 47 were included in the analysis, two were excluded as the participants did not state which staff group they were part of. The largest group of respondents were the junior doctors (26 responses) followed by the registrars (8 responses), nurse practitioners (6 responses), H24 coordinators (5 responses) and two responses from clinical support workers.

The AWS tool provided a worklife profile for staff working within the H24 service and highlighted areas that may warrant further attention. For the complete sample, the areas that were identified as warranting further attention included workload, control and reward. Workload was identified as requiring attention for 4 of the 5 staff groups, namely the nurse practitioners, clinical support workers, junior doctors and registrars. The staff groups that had the highest number of areas that require additional attention were the junior doctor and registrar groups, which also included control, reward, and fairness.

Discussion and Conclusion

The benefit of this tool is the AWS provides a quick and practical means for assessing areas that are to be addressed in improvement work, which may allow for the monitoring of these work system elements that contribute to professional wellbeing. The AWS provided a validated method to measure professional wellbeing and provided a quantitative measure that strongly supported qualitative results from previous project elements. The survey itself was easy to administer and

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compile results, meaning that this was an efficient tool to capture a snapshot of professional wellbeing in the UK healthcare setting.

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