

KING'S
College
LONDON

The stress of dental practice

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Overview

- What is stress ?
- How to cope with stress
 - General approaches
 - Specific issues

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Dentistry is stressful

Physical, Emotional and Social
Distress

Questionnaire studies

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Physical, Emotional and Social Distress

Elevated levels of

- Cardiovascular disease
- Alcoholism
- Drug Abuse
- Divorce
- Suicide

have been noted (Howard et al, 1976; Kent 1987)

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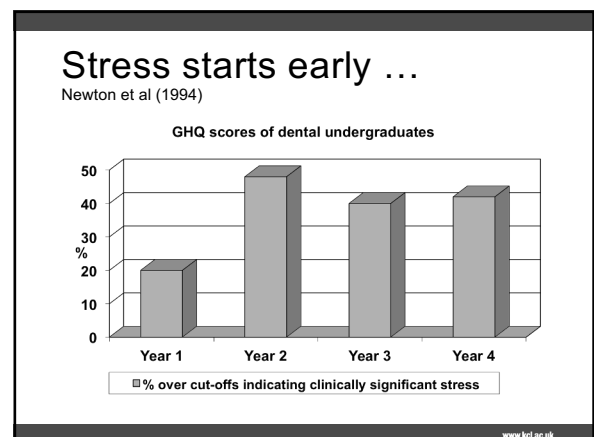
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Questionnaire studies

Many questionnaire and other survey methods have suggested that dentists and other health care professionals have higher 'stress' than the general population.

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Burnout (Denton et al 2008)

Survey of 500 GDPs

Approximately 8% of respondents had scores suggestive of burnout on all three scales of the MBI-HSS, and a further 18.5% had high scores in two of the domains.

Eighty-three percent of respondents had work engagement scores suggestive of moderate or high work engagement.

Dentists with postgraduate qualifications and those who work in larger teams had lower burnout scores and more positive work engagement scores. Dentists who spend a greater proportion of their time in NHS practice showed lower work engagement and higher levels of burnout.

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Burnout (Collin et al 2019)

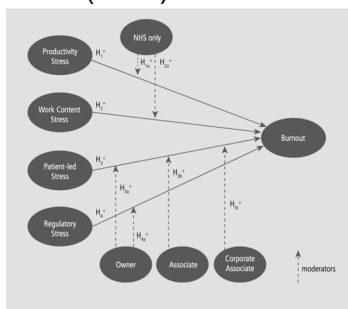
On-line survey of 2053 respondents

Burnout in 87.7% GDP
83.3% CDS

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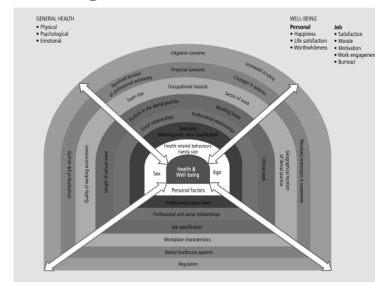
Predictors of Burnout (Toon et al (2019)



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Influences on the experience of well being (Colonio Salazar et al 2019)



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What is stress ?

Stress as a stimulus

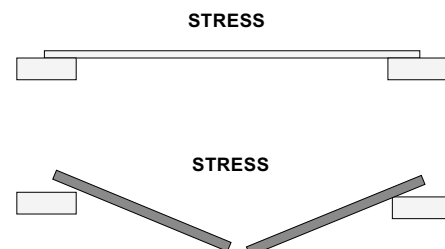
Stress as a response

Stress as both a stimulus and a response

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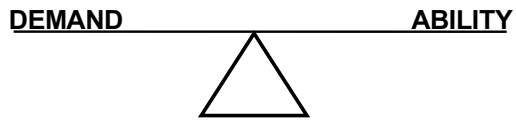
Stress as a stimulus



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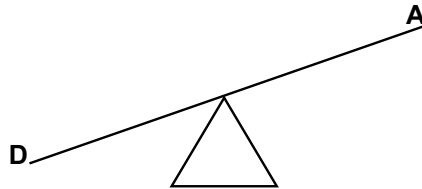
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A stimulus based model of stress



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Stress = imbalance



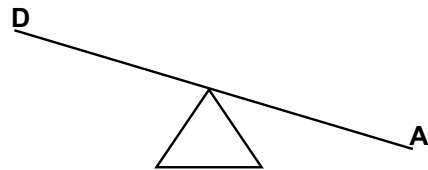
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“It’s the fact that when you’re already fully booked and you have all the extra ones to try and squeeze in, this is the problem. If I’m fully booked and no extra ones come in then it’s simply just a reasonable session”

General Dentist, Majority NHS practice

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Stress = imbalance



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Stimulus properties of stress

Nature of stress	Controllable	Uncontrollable
Predictable	May be challenging, may be boring	Challenge
Unpredictable	Challenge	Stressful

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“I’ve got 5 surgeries here and another practice to run as well as things keep breaking down and going wrong and they keep asking me questions constantly. So I suppose that inevitably wears you down over the day”

General Dentists, Majority NHS practice

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Sources of stress

Dental Nurse
Hygienist
Dental Practitioner

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Sources of stress – Dental Nurse

Earning enough
Being blamed for mistakes
Long hours
Being behind schedule
Dealing with money
Feeling undervalued
Difficult patients

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Sources of stress - Hygienist

Feeling an 'outsider' in the practice
Dentists undervalue prevention
Patient appointments booked too closely together, so time management difficult

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Sources of stress - Dentist

Professions
Remuneration
Characteristics of practice

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Comparisons of specialties

Community dentistry has been found to be as stressful as general dental practice (Humphris & Peacock, 1992)

Newton et al (2002) No differences between clinical specialties, paediatric dentists reported more problems with patients

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Remuneration

Very little evidence, however
Humphris & Peacock (1992) – little evidence of difference between GDP and CDS

Newton & Gibbons (1996) – perceived stress lower in GDP's working in independent capitation scheme compared to NHS

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Practice Characteristics

Cooper, Watts & Kelly (1987)

Time and scheduling pressures

Pay-related stressors

Patients' unfavourable perceptions of dentists

Staff and technical problems

Dealing with patients

Cooper & Humphris (1997)

Changes in dental system

High patient expectations

Staff turnover

Financial worries

Too many patients

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Consumerism in Healthcare (Marko Vujicic, personal communication)

- Self Diagnosis
- Un-doctoring
 - On-line search
 - Social network discussion
- Alternatives and substitutes
- Medical shopping
- Appl-ification
- Pricing transparency
- User experience

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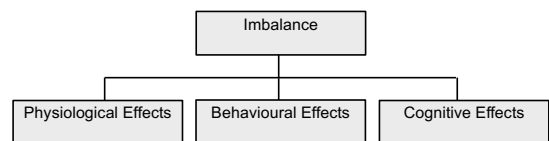
"We're not trained as businessmen, we're trained as dentists. And yet we are now businessmen and it's a question of trying to get the right balance, the right compromise between doing the dentistry and getting the right turnover"

General Dentist, Majority NHS practice

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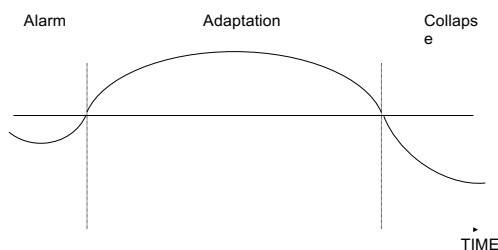
The response to stress



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Stress as a response



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The response to stress - physiological

Increased blood pressure
Increased heart rate
Muscular tension
Decreased immune response

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The response to stress - behavioural

Insomnia
Fatigue
Increased smoking
Increased alcohol consumption
Change in diet
Decreased repertoire of coping behaviours
Social withdrawal

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The response to stress - cognitive

Anxiety
Depression
Poor concentration
Memory loss
Low self-esteem
Intrusive negative thoughts

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Unhelpful styles of thinking

Filtering: You take the negative details and magnify them while filtering out all the positive aspects of a situation
Polarised thinking/absolutes: Things are black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you are a failure. There is no middle ground.
Mind reading: Without their saying so, you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do.
Catastrophising: You expect disaster. 'What if...'
Personalisation: Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you
Shoulds/musts: You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act.
Blaming: you hold other people responsible for your pain, or blame yourself for every problem
Overgeneralisation: inferring a general rule from one incident. Because something happened once, it will always happen

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An example

"I used to look in the appointment book each night before I left ... and if I saw this one name, Patient A, I'll call her, that's it I'd be up all night worrying if she would be happy with her treatment or complain"

Magnification
Catastrophising
Ruminating
{An implied 'Should'}

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The response to stress - impact on team relationships

Poor communication
Decline in work motivation
Increase staff absence and turnover
Lack of clarity in team roles

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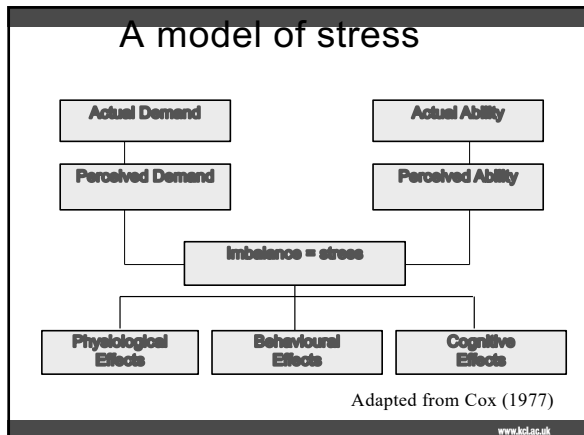
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The response to stress – Health

Physical
- Asthma
- Coronary Heart Disease
- Headaches & Migraine
- Ulcers
Psychological
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self esteem
- Insomnia

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Coping with stress

How do dentists manage their stress?
What other ways of managing stress could be developed?

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Managing Stress

In general dentists show a limited range of stress management skills. Newton & Gibbons suggest that most fall into 2 groups

‘Switching off’ from dentistry
Exercise and hobbies

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‘Switching off’

“I used to actively try and switch off. In fact at 6 o’clock in the evening I’d say, Right I’m no longer a dentist”. NHS Dentist

“When I leave work, I leave everything behind and I don’t go home and worry about things”. NHS Dentist

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Exercise/Hobbies

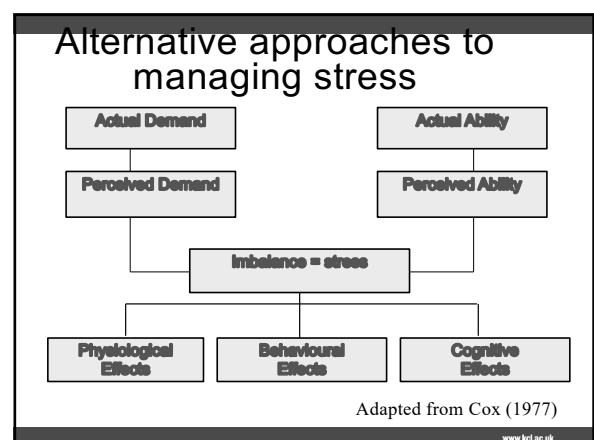
“I play golf”. Independent Dentist

“I dig my garden and after a while the tension just slips away”. NHS Dentist

“I do a lot of work with my hands. Wood work. I have a workshop in my garden and I go there”. Independent Dentist

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Managing stress

Physical approaches
Behavioural approaches
Cognitive approaches
Social approaches
Management approaches

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Managing stress - physical

Relieving general tension (relaxation,
breathing techniques, exercise, yoga)
Improved diet
Reducing caffeine
Improved physical working environment

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Managing stress - behavioural

Time management
Communication skills
Social and interpersonal skills
Practice management skills
Problem anticipation
Planning rest periods

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Managing stress - cognitive

Reassessment of one's attitudes and expectations
Clear appraisal of priorities
Examining irrational beliefs
Cognitive restructuring
Not catastrophising

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Cognitive restructuring

Developing an alternative way of thinking...more helpful / adaptive thoughts

Via...

- Disputing/Socratic questioning
- Assessing the evidence
- Writing letters
- Behavioural experiments
- Stress inoculation training

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Disputing / Socratic questioning

(Asking questions to elicit answers that are then questioned)

Is that so all of the time? Are there situations where things are different?
How might someone else view the situation?
What good comes from holding this belief?
Why might any of us have that thought at some time?
Where is it written that you must...?
Who says you should...?
What makes this too hard...?
How does it follow that because it happened once it must therefore happen again?
How does being called stupid make you completely stupid?
How does failing make you a total failure



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Changing your thoughts

What happened?

What did I feel?

What did I think?

What type of thoughts are there?
(list all the better that apply)

- Perfectionism
- The tyranny of the shoulds
- Black and white thinking
- Overgeneralisation
- Selective focus
- Discounting the positive
- Jumping to conclusions
- Magnification
- Emotional reasoning
- Negative labelling
- Personalising and blaming

What could I have thought?

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Managing stress - social

Identify social support (family, friends)
Identify professional support (local branch of BDA)

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Managing stress - management

Annual salary review
Individual performance review
Role clarity and identification of duties and responsibilities
Staff meetings

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Time management

Identify your priorities and goals
Examine how you allocate time to goals
Manage both your own time and external demands on your time

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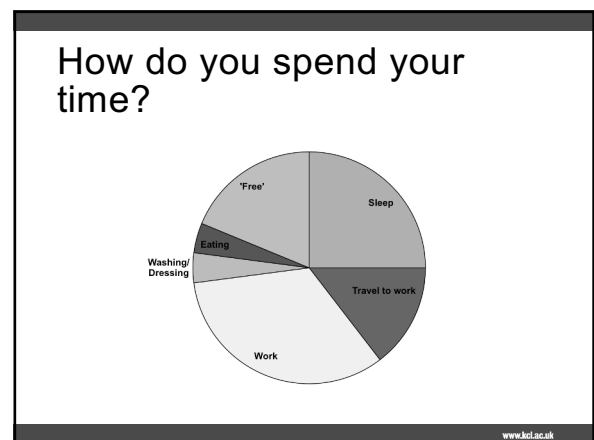
Priorities and goals

What is important to you ?
What do you want to achieve ?
What kind of working environment and relationships are important to you ?

This is NOT a 'To Do' list

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Allocate time to tasks

	Important	Not important
Urgent	Crises	Interruptions Phone calls Mobile phones
Not urgent	Evaluation Planning Routine tasks	E-mail

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Interruptions

Casual callers / visitors
Telephone calls
Patients

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Meetings

Why is the meeting being held?
What does it hope to accomplish?
Does it have a stated purpose, starting time and finishing time?
Have you prepared?
Is it a good use of your time?

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Changing behaviour

Unhealthy behaviours
Coping behaviours
Responses to critical incidents

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Coping behaviours - the 5 'D's

Delegate. Can you give this work to someone else?
Divide. Can you break the task into smaller more manageable pieces?
Divert. Is there a different way round this problem?
Discuss. Share the problem with colleagues. Seek their help in finding solutions.
Develop. Learn new skills to cope. For example accounting, business skills, relaxation techniques.

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Changing your behaviour

What was the event that sparked the behaviour?

What did I do?

What else could I have done?

What were the barriers to me doing that?
Barriers in the situation

Barriers in my thoughts

Other people as barriers

Other barriers

Think 10% of changing behaviour

- Delegate
- Divide: Break the task into smaller bits which can be delegated or shared
- Divert: Is there a different way to tackle the problem?
- Discuss with colleagues
- Develop: Learn new skills

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Critical incidents

"The worst thing is I had a patient with an anaphylactic shock on me twelve to eighteen months ago which was the most horrendous thing ever and so now every local I'm doing, I'm waiting for it to happen again and I'm living in fear basically"

Dental practitioner

Selective focus Magnification Overgeneralisation

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Coping with critical incidents

Recognise the impact of the event upon yourself and your team

Identify sources of support

Review the incident, learn from it and put it in its proper place

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Evidence

Arango et al (2018)

Identify a range of preventive strategies to enhance mental health in a range of populations.

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Newton et al (2006)

No significant difference in the levels of work-related stress reported by 19 participants before and after the intervention. However there were significant reductions in their self-reported psychological distress (Mean GHQ score prior to intervention 14.8, Mean score post intervention 9.4), and changes in the participants' use of specific coping strategies. The participants rated the intervention as a positive experience.

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Further reading

General Dental Council Report on Mental Health and well being in dentistry 2021
<https://www.gdc-uk.org/about-us/what-we-do/research/our-research-library/detail/report/mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-dentistry-a-rapid-evidence-assessment>.

Key determinants of health and wellbeing of dentists within the UK: a rapid review of over two decades of research. Fiorella B Colonio Salazar, Kavin Sipiyaruk, Sandra White, Jennifer E Gallagher. BDJ 2019

A survey of stress, burnout and well-being in UK dentists. Collin V, Toon M, O'Selmo E, Reynolds L, Whitehead P. BDJ 2019

An analysis of stress and burnout in UK general dental practitioners: sub dimensions and causes. Toon M, Collin V, Whitehead P, Reynolds L. BDJ 2019

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