



A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING
YOUR WELLBEING

GPEX



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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to support your wellbeing throughout your GP career. It is divided into three sections.

Resources

This section includes several pages that provide you with key resources to support your wellbeing. Topics covered include monitoring your wellbeing, managing uncertainty tolerance, and developing peer networks. These topics have been shortlisted from the GPEx Wellbeing Repository. You can find further resources on a wide variety of topics at the full repository in GPEx wellbeing.

Wellbeing Plan

This part of the guide helps you develop a wellbeing plan for your GP career. It involves identifying your values, setting wellbeing goals, and identifying activities to achieve these goals. This plan can be updated as often as you like to reflect your current needs.

Burnout Contingency Plan

In this final section, you will be able to develop a plan for how to manage burnout should it arise. This will draw on your Wellbeing Plan in addition to further activities. This section also includes information about different sources of support you can draw upon.



ESTABLISHING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Exercise

Current Australian guidelines for physical exercise recommend that individuals aged 18-64 should have a weekly exercise regime incorporating:

- 2 sessions of strength exercises; and
- 2.5-5 hours of moderate intensity exercise or 1.25-2.5 hours of high intensity exercise

Visit [this website](#) for guidance around how to incorporate exercise into your schedule. [This website](#) also provides downloadable resources, including an exercise calendar. You can also find various types of exercise regime videos tailored to different aims and age groups

Diet

The following websites provide healthy recipe ideas that can be made in relatively little time:

[20 Healthy Meals You Can Make in 20 Minutes](#)

[Healthy quick dinner recipes](#)

Sleep

Managing sleep is another strategy to maintain a strong foundation for wellbeing. The following websites provide suggestions for enhancing your sleep hygiene for everybody, but also offer specific suggestions for those with shift work/on-call duties:

[Hints and tips for shift-workers](#)

[Practical Advice For Shift Workers – NHS](#)

You can also consider using meditative apps, which often include tools focused on sleep. Two major platforms are:

[Calm](#)

[Headspace](#)

DEVELOPING PEER NETWORKS

In addition to your personal networks, it's important to cultivate strong professional relationships. This is particularly important for GPs and GP registrars, as General Practice can be quite isolating compared to some other specialties. Accordingly, try to make the most of opportunities to build relationships with those around you, including others at your practice. The support you build here will be invaluable for your wellbeing throughout your career.

Online Networks

The following websites offer access to a variety of online communities that you may be interested in joining.

- [Medical mothers group](#) – a Facebook group for mothers in medicine.
- [Connect@ACRRM](#) – an online community provided by ACRRM for members that allows you to connect with Australian and international Rural Generalists. Resources and professional learning opportunities are also provided
- [GPs Down Under](#) – a Facebook group for Australian and New Zealand GPs
- [AIDA mentoring](#) – the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association provides a mentoring program for their members
- [The Essential Network](#) – an initiative of the Black Dog Institute, this online community offers resources to support health professionals' mental wellbeing as well as opportunities to speak with others about wellbeing



MANAGING PERSONAL- PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Your personal and professional lives are strongly connected, and events in one domain will affect the other. An important burnout prevention strategy is to try and establish boundaries between these domains to contain these interactions to a level that you are comfortable with. What these boundaries look like will vary from person to person. This is perfectly natural, as outlined in [this blog post](#).

Boundaries are also pertinent if you are experiencing burnout. Boundaries often become blurred as a result of burnout. A key strategy to reduce burnout levels is to re-instate boundaries between your personal and professional lives.

Simple strategies can be put in place to help manage these boundaries. A major strategy is ensuring you are keeping healthy working hours as much as you can. If you are struggling to do this, it is worthwhile speaking to your supervisor, practice manager or Program Coordinator to see if you can get further support. Another important strategy is limiting your engagement with work outside of work hours as much as practicable.

Managing boundaries can be even more challenging if you are working in a rural or remote area. This article from [CRANA+](#) offers some further guidance.

Ethical obligations

Managing personal-professional boundaries is not only important for your wellbeing, but it's also an ethical obligation that you face as a medical practitioner. The below articles provide guidance for navigating these boundaries:

[Maintaining professional boundaries](#)

[Australian Family Physician - Managing professional boundaries](#)

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

An inherent part of General Practice is the uncertainty you face with every patient who walks through the door. This can be one of the most stressful aspects of General Practice and it's important to acknowledge how common it is, particularly for registrars. The good news is that registrars' tolerance of uncertainty tends to improve as they progress through training. There are several strategies you can put in place to become more comfortable with uncertainty. [This article](#) outlines one registrar's advice to her peers about navigating General Practice.

Discomfort with uncertainty can become a problem when it increases worrying outside worktime. [This module](#) provides some general information and exercises for managing worry that can be applied to uncertainty tolerance.

Managing uncertainty can be particularly problematic for those who identify as 'perfectionists', as uncertainty presents a major obstacle to securing the 'perfect' outcome. Perfectionism is quite common within the medical world, but can be incredibly debilitating. [This module](#) provides further information about perfectionism as well as some exercises for challenging it.






Please note that neither of the above sources constitute professional advice and you should seek professional support from your GP, or a licensed medical or mental health professional if you have concerns.

Finally, whilst uncertainty can be uncomfortable, it's important to recall that this discomfort is serving a purpose – it's a reminder that you are facing something new and need to be cautious about ensuring that you have as much information as possible at the time. This is a strength, helping you try to make the best decisions you can for your patients. It just needs to be balanced so that it doesn't get in the way of you learning and working as a medical practitioner. Remember to call on your supervisor or peers when you need them.



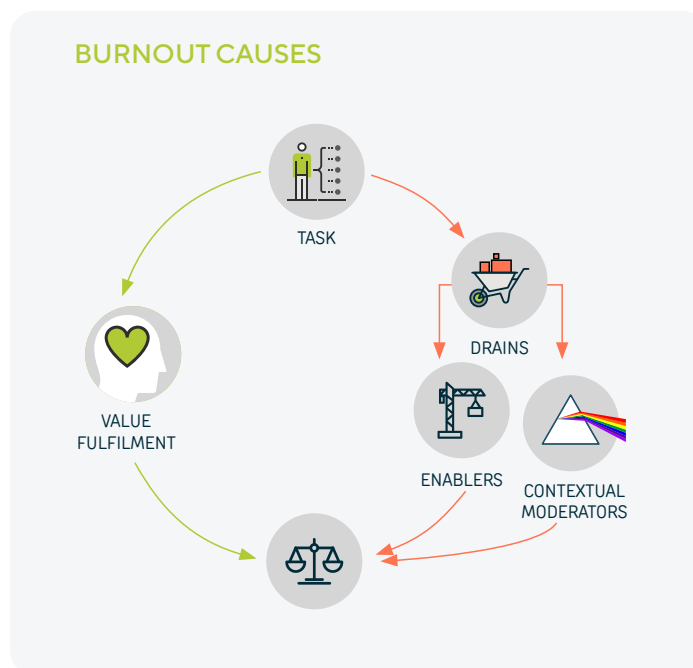
WHAT IS BURNOUT?

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that manifests in a variety of ways recognised as an ‘occupational phenomenon’ under the ICD-11.¹ Although there are many different theories regarding burnout, research specifically with GPs has identified five overarching dimensions.^{2,3} These are shown below.

Altered Emotion		Increased emotionality, including anger, irritability, anxiety, crying, emotional flatness
Compromised Performance		Inefficiency, reduced quality of care, missing deadlines, reduced professionalism
Disengagement		Reduced interest in work and learning, avoidance, minimal effort and enthusiasm, non-adherence
Exhaustion		Reduced empathy, cognitive rigidity, physical fatigue
Overwhelmed		Feeling constantly pressured and overworked, adopting maladaptive coping strategies, powerlessness, ceasing personal activities

What causes burnout?

To understand what factors cause burnout, you also need to understand why these factors cause burnout. We can consider any task that you face, either in your personal or professional life, and divide it into two components. The first of these are the parts that rejuvenate you. These can be viewed in terms of value fulfilment; consider the aspects of a demand or task that are meaningful and rewarding for you. For example, making a correct diagnosis could fulfil your value of mastery, or actively listening and empathising with a patient could fulfil your values of caring and mindfulness. On the other hand, a demand or task will have elements that are draining for you; they require you to exert energy. This could be the high volume of decision-making, navigating bureaucratic systems, or relationship breakdowns.



These 'drains' are then affected by another two factors that occur simultaneously. One of these is 'enablers', which are resources and supports around you that can take on some of the workload. This can include:

- Practice staff, who can help with administrative tasks
- Peers who you can debrief with and seek clinical supervision from
- People in your personal life, who can provide practical and emotional support
- Access to informational resources (e.g., academic websites and journals) and tools (e.g., diagnostic equipment) to support decision-making.

The second factor is how the context can magnify or minimise the extent of the drains. This includes a broad array of factors, including:

- Your own psychology (e.g., personality traits such as perfectionism, tolerance of uncertainty)
- Your professional experience and confidence
- The amount of autonomy and flexibility you enjoy across different domains of your life
- Financial stress faced by you and/or your practice
- Attitudes of medical culture (e.g., an emphasis on self-sacrifice)

These enablers and contextual factors determine the ultimate magnitude of a drain, which is then balanced against the amount of value fulfilment you receive from a task. The net result of this process influences whether a task ultimately is draining or replenishing. Underlying this interaction is a 'wellbeing reservoir', which refers to your energy and motivation to satisfy demands. You draw upon this reservoir when you engage in activities to satisfy demands. Burnout arises when your reservoir is being depleted faster than it is being replenished. This occurs when the demands you face outweigh the fulfilment of your values.^{2,3}

What can I do about it?

Burnout is a complex phenomenon that requires efforts to be made by all stakeholders. As such, burnout prevention and management is a responsibility shared by individuals, workplaces, training organisations and systems. From research with registrars, we have identified some steps that individuals can take to minimise their likelihood of experiencing burnout, as well as steps to manage burnout if it does occur.⁴ These are listed below.

1. Explore what your values and goals are, how you can realistically fulfil these, and prioritise engagement in these activities (e.g., investing in positive personal and professional relationships, leading a physically healthy lifestyle)

2. Using relevant resources, proactively reflect on what burnout may look like for you and adopt techniques to recognise early warning signs. Using this information, proactively prepare your own contingency plan (see pages 19-26) detailing what to do if you notice signs that you are heading towards burnout
3. Learn about, and use, psychological strategies to modify perceptions of stressors (e.g., reframing, acceptance)
 - Note: Whilst using psychological strategies such as reframing is not always appropriate, such strategies can be effective when used with other strategies (e.g., debriefing) in response to certain inevitable stressors, such as dealing with aggressive patients.
4. Strive to establish and maintain boundaries between your personal and professional domains to prevent undesired spill over
 - Note: What form such boundaries take will depend upon your preferences and the context in which you are working and living.
5. Refer to wellbeing-promotion and burnout-management resources (e.g., information guides, lists of supports; see the GPEX wellbeing repository)
6. If you are experiencing burnout, seek help from those best-suited to providing support (e.g., GP, practice, Doctors Health Service, peers, mental health professionals)
 - Note: The best person or people to seek support from will depend on the specific situation and whom you feel most comfortable approaching.

References

1. World Health Organisation. International Classification of Diseases for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics. 2018; 11th Revision: <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en>.
2. Prentice S, Elliott T, Dorstyn D, Benson J. Burnout, wellbeing, and how they relate: A qualitative study in General Practice trainees. Medical Education. In Press.
3. Prentice S, Mullner H, Benson J, Kay M. "To give them the passion, we've got to have full batteries": Burnout in Australian General Practice Supervisors [Manuscript in Preparation].
4. Prentice S, Elliott T, Benson J, Dorstyn D. Burnout and wellbeing in the Australian General Practice Training context: stakeholder-informed recommendations. In Press.



MONITORING YOUR WELLBEING

Monitoring your own wellbeing can be tricky, because we lack distance to get a more objective perspective on ourselves. Our minds are masters of rationalising and excusing warning signs that others may be more concerned about. That's why it's important to have a variety of tools at your disposal to get another perspective. Below is a list of different tools you can use to monitor your wellbeing. Please note that none of these tools are 'diagnostic' and you should consult your GP, another medical professional or a mental health professional if you are concerned about your wellbeing. Bringing these results along to a consult can be helpful.



Mental health

- The [Kessler-10 \(K10\)](#) is a broad-based measure of general psychological distress.
- [This website](#) offers screening tools covering a variety of mental health concerns, including anxiety, mood, eating disorders, stress and psychosis.
- [The AUDIT](#) helps to classify your relationship with alcohol.
- [The ProQOL](#) offers a global assessment of your professional quality of life, including topics such as compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout.
- The RBST is an evidence-based, brief screening [tool for burnout](#).



Physical health

- You can conduct your own brief physical health assessment by following the instructions provided at [this website](#).
- [This tool](#) can help assess your sleeping patterns and highlight if there are any areas of concern.
- [The AMA](#) has produced this tool to assess levels of fatigue amongst doctors.



If you're interested in this topic, you can complete a [free online course](#), provided by [Drs4Drs](#) that will teach you more about doctors' wellbeing. This will increase your awareness of your own wellbeing, as well as help you understand the wellbeing of your peers.

To access these resources, either click the links or scan the QR code.

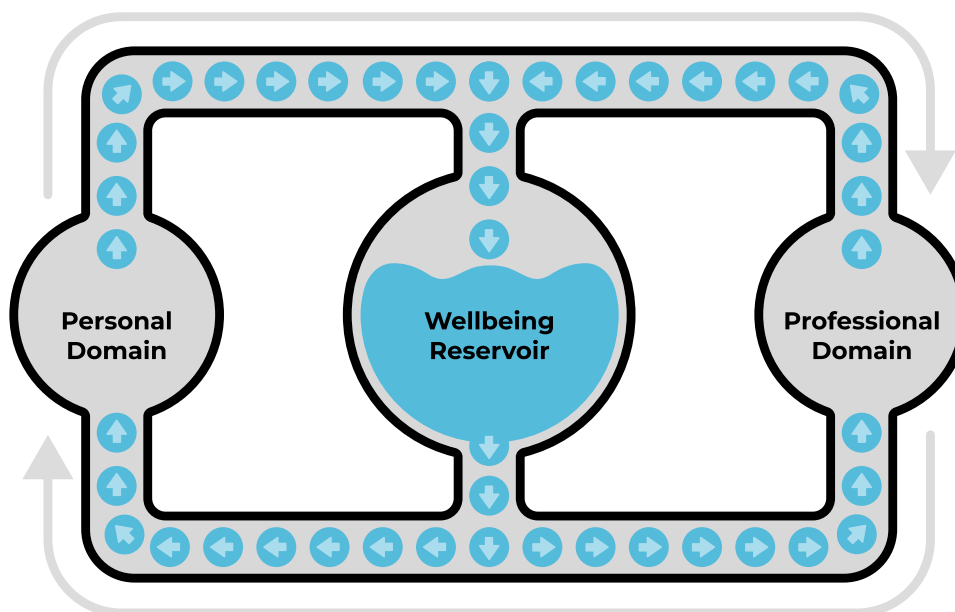


WELLBEING PLAN

About wellbeing

Wellbeing is a complex process comprising multiple elements. At a broad level, we can identify three elements: your personal domain, your professional domain and your wellbeing reservoir (see below figure). Your personal and professional domains represent the personal and professional aspects of your life; the outer lines denote how events in one domain affect the other domain. The 'wellbeing reservoir' represents the amount of 'psychological energy' you have. These three elements interact. There are demands in both domains and, to fulfil these demands, you need to expend energy by drawing on your

wellbeing reservoir. When fulfilling these demands is meaningful (i.e., fulfils your values), this is rewarding and replenishes your wellbeing reservoir, thus creating a cycle. Since this is a cycle, though, it means there needs to be a balance; if the demands outpace the rewards, this means your wellbeing reservoir is depleted too quickly. This then turns into a vicious cycle, whereby you have less capacity to meet demands, which further impedes your ability to replenish your reservoir. Thus, it's important to establish a balance between the demands and their rewards.



Values

Values act as the compass by which we navigate our life. Values are not the same as goals – you can never ‘achieve’ or ‘complete’ a value. Rather, they are aspirations for how we wish to be. Values will differ between people and no values are superior to others. You do not need to justify your values. Awareness of your values is also crucial to managing your wellbeing and avoiding burnout.

[Complete the values checklist tool](#) to identify your values, then review your values and choose the 10 most important. You can use this tool as many times as you like.



In the space below, list the top 10 values.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Wellbeing goals and activities

To help guide your efforts to support your wellbeing, it can be useful to set goals. In the first two sections below, set yourself at least one goal for the next six months for each of the eight categories. Then, for each goal, identify activities that can help you to reach these goals and consider which of your values are being addressed by that activity.

Personal domain

Area	Goal/s	Activity	Value/s
Physical wellbeing			
Psychological wellbeing			
Social wellbeing			
Outside interests			



Professional domain

Area	Goal/s	Activity	Value/s
Competence			
Confidence			
Relationships			
Rewards			



Personal-Professional Boundaries

In addition to supporting your personal and professional wellbeing, it's also crucial to consider how to manage how the two interact. The first step in this is establishing a goal for your 'personal-professional ratio' (i.e. how you are dividing your time between your personal and professional demands). When creating this ratio, try to make it both healthy and realistic. Also include some flexibility by considering ranges that you would be happy with rather than a set number. An example is shown below.

(Example)

Personal			Professional		
Lower level	Ideal level	Upper level	Lower level	Ideal level	Upper level
30%	50%	60%	40%	50%	70%

Complete the below table.

Personal			Professional		
Lower level	Ideal level	Upper level	Lower level	Ideal level	Upper level

Outline some strategies to help you work towards the above ratio in the space below.

Strategies

BURNOUT CONTINGENCY PLAN

Early warning signs

Burnout lies on a spectrum that ranges in severity. It's much easier to manage burnout when it's in its earlier stages.

Accordingly, it is useful to be able to notice the early warning signs of burnout. Examples of early warning signs include a reduced ability for empathy and overexerting yourself.

In the space below, list five signs that you might be starting to experience burnout. Try to choose signs that span psychological, behavioural and physical symptoms.

1
2
3
4
5





Action plan

If you are experiencing the above signs or are generally worried that you are experiencing burnout, you can start to implement this action plan.

Troubleshooting tool

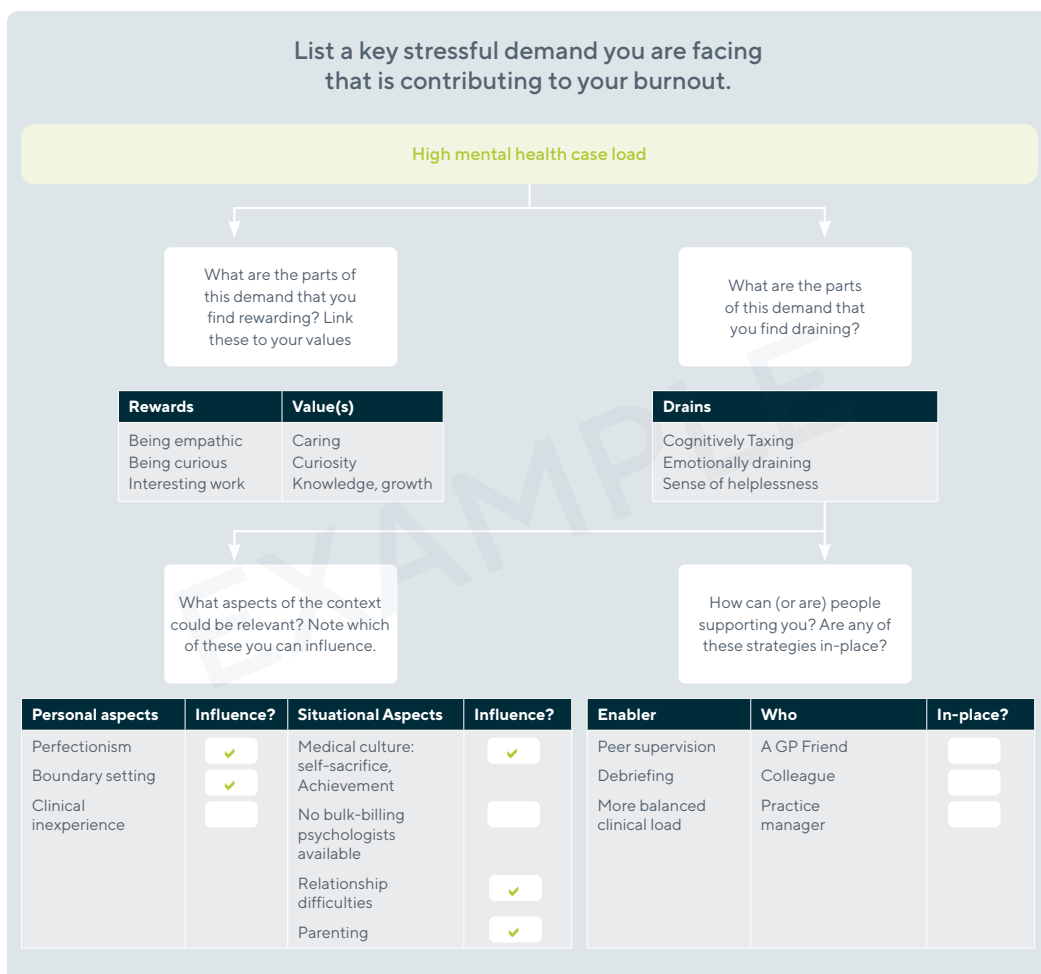
The first step after acknowledging your burnout is to try to understand what is causing it. Burnout can arise from a variety of places, so the below tool can help you think about factors occurring in your personal and professional lives that might be problematic.

To use the tool, start by thinking about one demand that you are facing that is highly stressful. Thinking back to the model we described on page 7 you can divide this demand into two aspects: the parts of it that you

find rewarding (i.e., what values does it fulfil?), and the parts that you find draining. Focusing some more on the draining parts, think about the context surrounding this demand. Consider both what you bring to the situation (e.g., your beliefs, skills etc.) and what are other background characteristics of the situation (e.g., time pressures, cultural norms within medicine). For each of these, think about whether they are things you have any influence over, even if it's a small amount of influence. Next, think about who you can draw upon to help you manage this demand (e.g., other GPs, your practice staff) and how they can help you. Again, for each of these, consider whether you have put these supports in place for yourself. Once you have finished using this tool, look for all

the boxes where you have ticked that you have influence over the factor and brainstorm what you can do to exercise that influence. Likewise, look at all the boxes that remain unticked for supports you could put in place and think about how to build in those supports to your personal and professional environments.

Another part of the troubleshooting process is to review your values and explore how the above factors are preventing you from fulfilling these. Look back at your wellbeing activities and see if any of these are no longer occurring. Collectively, this information can provide you with a sense of what the problem is, which you can then speak to someone about to seek support.



List a key stressful demand you are facing that is contributing to your burnout.

What are the parts of this demand that you find rewarding? Link these to your values

What are the parts of this demand that you find draining?

Rewards	Value(s)

Drains

What aspects of the context could be relevant? Note which of these you can influence.

How can (or are) people supporting you? Are any of these strategies in-place?

Personal aspects	Influence?	Situational Aspects	Influence?

Enabler	Who	In-place?



Nutrient-rich activities

As part of your burnout management plan, another key strategy is to try and restart fulfilling your values. The trouble is that, when you are experiencing burnout, you're probably feeling quite exhausted and time poor. Therefore, it's important to have some activities you can do that are 'nutrient rich' - they efficiently address multiple values simultaneously.

In the below section, review the activities you identified on pages

13 and 14 to help you work towards your wellbeing goals and think about how you can integrate these into nutrient-rich activities. As an example, suppose you were focusing on values of self-care and being mindful. These could individually be achieved by completing exercise (self-care) and practising a mindfulness meditation (mindful). You could integrate these activities, though, into a mindful walk.

As we mentioned before, though, you're likely to also feel quite time

poor. What we can then do is try to integrate nutrient-rich activities into your daily routine. Using the above example, you could park your car further away from your work each morning and engage in a mindful walk when going to and leaving work.

Review the activities you identified as part of your wellbeing goals and see how you can integrate them into 'nutrient-rich' activities that you can implement if you're starting to experience burnout.

Activity 1	Activity 2	Nutrient-Rich Activity

Supports

A critical step in burnout management is reaching out to other for support. Other people can help provide another perspective, offer suggestions, and help you get the support you need. Different people can provide different kinds of support, so it's important that you're able to reach the right people.

Support people in your personal life

Think about the people you value the most in your personal life. Make a list of five people who you can contact if you feel you are struggling:

1

2

3

4

5

Support people in your professional life

If you have questions, concerns or need support, it's vital that you speak to someone about this. Those around you cannot help you unless they know about it!

General Practice can be isolating, but there are people whom you can turn to. As a first port of call, consider your peers; people outside of medicine can help to bring a fresh point of view, but other doctors may have an easier time understanding the pressures of medicine. Ideally there are other GPs you can speak to, whether or not they are at your practice, as they will likely have similar experiences to you. This could be at an individual level, or you could look at forming or joining group of peers, such as a Balint group. You can read more about [Balint groups here](#).

Below are a few such networks:

- [The Balint Society of Australia & New Zealand](#)
- [The Essential Network \(TEN\) for Health Professionals](#)

Also consider whether there are people in your practice you can speak to, in particular practice managers or principals. If you feel comfortable approaching these people, they are likely to be in a position to put practical measures in place to help you. Even if they are not able to directly help you, speaking with them can help them to understand your broader situation, and they may be able to make other accommodations.

For registrars, at a general level, [this website](#) gives you an overview of key contacts who can help you resolve various issues.

Issue	Contact/s
Patient load or type of presentations	Supervisor, Practice Manager
Workload (i.e. clinical, administrative)	Principal Supervisor, Practice Manager
Personal matters impacting training (e.g. mental or physical health, family)	Practice Manager, Principal
Clinical skills and knowledge	Supervisor, Medical Educator (Registrars)

Mental health support services

If you're struggling, it's vital that you seek professional mental health support. You can contact your GP as a starting point. Various other support services are also available. A list of these are provided below:

Australasian Doctors Health Network

[This website](#) is designed to bring together doctors and medical students who share an interest in the health and wellbeing of their colleagues. You'll also find contact details for doctors' health services and GPs which operate 24/7 around Australia.

DRS4DRS: mental health support: 1300 374 377

[DRS4DRS](#) promotes the health and wellbeing of doctors and medical students across Australia with online resources, referral services and can assist with finding a GP.

Doctors' Health SA

This is a [not-for-profit service](#) that provides medical services for South Australian medical students and doctors.

RACGP GP Support Program, 1300 361 008

All [RACGP members](#), including registrars, are eligible for a free counselling service with qualified psychologists and social workers.

ACRRM GP Support Program, 1800 818 728

[ACRRM members](#) can call the above phone number to access a free and confidential 24/7 employee assistance program.

Beyondblue, 1300 22 4636

[This website](#) collates phone services spanning a variety of issues, including gambling, alcohol and drug concerns, and debt. The phone number is a 24/7 brief support service with trained mental health professionals.

Lifeline, 13 11 14

You can call the above number or chat on the [Lifeline website](#) if you need urgent support because you are feeling overwhelmed or unsafe.





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