



GP suicides: LMCs call for action to reduce “appalling” numbers

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The BMA’s General Practitioners Committee (GPC) must lobby ministers for increased psychological support for GPs to reduce the “appalling” number of doctor suicides, local medical committees have urged.

The annual UK local medical committees conference in Belfast passed a motion on 19 March in recognition of “the appalling statistics and circumstances of doctor suicides.”

The conference instructed the GPC to raise the issue of GP suicide with “all major stakeholders” to seek a better understanding of any “preventable triggers and adverse drivers.”

The motion was proposed by Lucy Henshall of Suffolk local medical committee, who received a standing ovation from the room after delivering a moving speech in which she spoke about the suicide of her friend and colleague Richard Bennett in 2013.¹

Henshall spoke of a “systemic failure” by the NHS and wider society to look after sick GPs properly. She highlighted figures from the Office for National Statistics showing that 430 health professionals in England and Wales died by suicide from 2011 to 2015, including 81 doctors, and that female GPs have four times the risk of suicide than the general UK population.

She also noted figures showing that one in three GPs experiences depression, burnout, or both.

“As GPs, we deserve more than signposting to mindfulness,” she said. “Resilience alone will not keep GPs safe and well. We

deserve to be cared for ourselves, supported and encouraged in our daily work, valued and cared for when we are well, and, most of all, cared for if we become unwell. Because, conference, we are also human.”

She added, “We have a duty beyond this room to get the message out there.”

The motion also called for the GPC to lobby the government to “adequately resource proper psychological support systems for all GPs,” including those who are on parental or sickness leave or out of work, to prevent occupation related mental distress from developing.

The GPC should also press for proper, NHS funded coaching and supervision services to be made available to all GPs, the conference voted.

Sarah Westerbeek of Kent local medical committee was one of several GPs to speak in favour of the motion.

“Make no mistake, this is a crisis,” she said. “An increased risk of suicide is an entirely unacceptable occupational hazard, and we must act now.”

¹ Burnett A, Silovsky K, Richard Lisle Bennett. *BMJ* 2014;348:g187810.1136/bmj.g1878. Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>