

BMA wellbeing free text responses – strictly embargoed 00.01, Monday 1 June 2020

1. "I've had days where I have cried on my own. It's been very stressful - dealing with my personal risk and looking after patients." (Consultant, Yorkshire)
2. "I have been off work during this crisis with anxiety. I have not been able to deal with the stress and anxiety, which has been overwhelming compared to my colleagues. I feel so guilty about not supporting my patients and colleagues. I had been aware from international data that I had risk factors for severe disease but initially I was not willing to put myself as a special case. There seemed no proactive assessment of risk factors by the time I had already suffered a major breakdown in my mental health. Everything about the response at the start of this left me feeling unsafe and unsupported." (Consultant, Wales)
3. "Seeing people dying, receiving and breaking bad news, no socialising outside work to refresh and recharge – all these factors increased the level of anxiety and depression." (Junior doctor, London)
4. "The stress associated with increased risk of getting infected. Knowing that the BAME community is disproportionately affected." (Hospital doctor, West Midlands)
5. "I feel like I am more concerned for my family members and even though they support me fully, it feels like I am opening them to risk unwillingly. It does feel like I've signed up for the army and that I may get injured on the way – and I don't mind that. I signed up to be a doctor well before Covid when HIV, hepatitis and TB were feared. But my family didn't choose this career path, I feel like I've forced the risk on them and I can't get away from the guilt. Any time a family member coughs or looks unwell I worry that I am responsible." (Junior doctor, East Midlands)
6. "Loss of sleep, constant stress due to fears that I can bring the virus home and affect close ones." (SAS doctor*, Wales)
7. "I have asthma and I'm extremely stressed and anxious about becoming infected with Covid-19. Going to work is a very stressful experience. Once I'm there I take precautions and do my job to help patients but the thought of getting infected is in my head constantly". (SAS doctor, London)
8. "General anxiety levels raised for myself about personal safety regarding risk of exposure to Covid-19 and then taking it home to my partner who is 60, anxiety about safely managing clinical risk, increased isolation from the clinical team because of social distancing, and a steady stream of anxious colleagues at my door." (GP, Yorkshire)
9. "Feeling undervalued and expendable due to the unavailability of PPE and the lower levels recommended by PHE when compared with WHO. Feeling unable to help when multiple patients with Covid are deteriorating and dying." (Junior doctor, East of England)
10. "The ongoing flawed management of the pandemic and failing public health messaging is causing me to feel extremely stressed. I am not sure how much longer we can be expected to work under such pressure. The prospect of a second wave is very concerning, especially as many of us have worked extra hours, taken no holiday and are physically and mentally exhausted." (GP, North East)
11. "Anxiety disorder affecting sleep, constant fear of catching Covid 19 infection at workplace while dealing with asymptomatic Covid-carrying patients, and often struggle to get appropriate PPE." (SAS doctor, South East coast)
12. "I am frequently tearful about all those who have died; continuously fearful of contracting Covid and secondarily infecting my family (we are all non-white, so at increased risk). I live with a

continuous baseline anxiety, which I realise is due to fear and sadness that someone among my past and present colleagues and medic friends will die of Covid. Every day feels heavy, regardless of the actual patient workload; all daily activities take more effort (including the cognitive load of attention to PPE while at work) and on some days off from work I cannot muster the motivation to do anything but lie down. The constant need to keep up to date with Covid medical updates on all media is causing CPD burnout, as I have never 'studied' this much, day and night, even with three masters level qualifications." (Hospital doctor, North East)

13. "During Covid my anxiety about my own health and the health of my family has increased. I worry that I will cause my family members to become ill, or that I will become ill and have nobody to take care of my toddler, as we have no direct family nearby to help." (Junior doctor, North East)

14. "I feel I have aged over the past three months, with variable levels of anxiety and stress, it's been a rollercoaster of emotions, whilst trying to run a practice and protect my staff." (GP, Northern Ireland)

15. "I have found the episode draining, frustrating, irritating. I feel ignored, devalued, angry and at times undermined." (Hospital doctor, Scotland)

16. "I have never experienced this much stress in my whole career of 15 years." (SAS doctor, South East coast)

17. "I don't think I realised how stressful it was directly until I wasn't sleeping and bursting into tears in the car and when saying goodbye to my kids on the way to work." (GP, West Midlands)

18. "I think as doctors we want to be able fix people and make them better. Working on a Covid ward where all the patients are frail and elderly, and the majority of them dying and there being nothing we can do, has seriously impacted on my team's and my own mental health." (Junior doctor, West Midlands)

19. "Felt quite anxious walking into bays full of elderly Covid patients with only a surgical mask, pinny and gloves on. I felt that even though it was meeting guidance it was inadequate. I also felt overly emotional especially by the shows of gratitude. Also felt quite torn about policies letting only one relative in to see dying patients and worried about the psychological consequences for families." (Hospital doctor, Yorkshire)

20. "Sadness that I couldn't do more." (North West)

21. "I feel sorry that thousands of patients have died because of this pandemic. As an experienced doctor I could have helped in several ways." (Junior doctor, London)

22. "Covid-19 has been a very challenging time for us all. We have been managing a lot of anxiety, especially regarding possible redeployment, keeping up to date with continually changing guidelines and fear about the virus itself. There is a real sense that everyone is emotionally drained now at this stage." (SAS doctor, Northern Ireland)

23. "It's like an increased awareness of going to battle front every day and you don't know who's next." (Junior doctor, South West)

24. "Hearing that so many colleagues lost their lives trying to fulfil their duties was devastating." (GP, London)

25. "It's difficult to get over watching people slip away without physical contact with their loved ones... it's painful. Saying that we tried our best when you know the best won't be good enough is excruciating." (Junior doctor, East of England)
26. "I think that when you're suffering a mental health depressive episode you need structure to your day and often structure and routine are at work but not now. Everything is different – shopping, life at home, work – and it seems so unreal you'll wonder if you will wake up soon. But you have to look around and you see death – young death – and you need to be grateful but you feel unreal, terrified or numb." (Hospital doctor, North East)
27. "I find myself completely at sea speaking to bereaved relatives. This kind of bereavement is not like any other I have had to deal with in my more than 30 years as a doctor." (GP, West Midlands)
28. "The pandemic has made me worry about myself, my husband, my children, my parents, my patients, colleagues and business. My anxiety has been relentless and changed the way I work, my self-worth and what I can provide for my patients. There feels like no light anywhere and no relief." (GP, North East)
29. "Each phase has brought different stresses and strains. The urgency to reconfigure at the beginning was a time full of adrenaline and anxiety of what was to come. Then the exhaustion of working all hours and not being able to sleep. Now the burnout that makes it hard to keep going and to have the energy to plan recovery or for a second wave. Plus all the worry you hold for yourself and your family. A rollercoaster with no end in sight." (Consultant, London)
30. "The huge uncertainties and risks make you feel like you have been thrown into a washing machine and tumbled around." (Consultant, South Central)
31. "During the early period the work felt extreme beyond anything we've seen before. At times it felt completely relentless without an end in sight. The most traumatic part was the stress on patients, and even more so, their relatives." (Junior doctor, London)
32. "I've experienced general stress and anxiety due to risk to the health of myself and my family, and due to massive changes in work and home routines." (Hospital doctor, Yorkshire)
33. "Covid has been hard on the whole population but it is particularly jarring to deal with such high mortality rates; medical complexity and long, gruelling patient journeys without our normal networks/communities, and without non-work related physical touch and comfort." (Junior doctor, East Midlands)
34. "Physical and mental fatigue has been a major factor when spending entire shifts in PPE." (Junior doctor, North East)
35. "Dealing with the impact of Covid-19 on my mental health has been tough. The support from friends, family and the general public has been incredible but, at times, being labelled a 'hero' has made it difficult to admit that I have struggled. The prolonged uncertainty is still on-going and not knowing what is happening week to week is very tough to deal with. With the added stress of not seeing friends and family and not being able to turn to my usual sport to de-stress is becoming increasingly more challenging. I struggle to sleep at times and on my days off it can be difficult to forget about work. Work is so busy that it's almost impossible to find the time to attend any of the well-being sessions." (GP trainee, South Central)
36. "The most difficult part of the day is when we update families and relatives about the progress and clinical situation of their beloved ones. Unfortunately, good news during this pandemic has been

rare. Only a few success stories, but most of the time we had to break bad news to relatives who cannot be physically present during those last moments, it is hard.” (Junior doctor, London)

37. “Stress mostly caused by lack of inadequate PPE, and very poor standards PPE guidelines based on logistics/costs rather than a scientific evidence to protect the healthcare worker. This means that you are working with a constant fear of getting infected with Covid (especially being an Asian ethnic minority) which in turn causes lots of anxiety, which in turn can affect your ability to give high quality care to your patients.” (Consultant, England)

38. “The workload has now become relentless. My mother died four weeks ago and because of the workload I was only able to take a day’s leave.” (GP, East of England)

39. “Living in constant anxiety that I will become infected and transmit it to my wife has made it difficult to go into work some days.” (SAS, South West)

40. “I am definitely anxious outside of work. I have experienced a lack of appetite, highly variable and very low mood, I have intermittently been socially withdrawn and very nihilistic. I am able to function well at work and a to prefer to be there than at home at the moment despite the risks and lack of facilities.” (Consultant, South Central)

41. “Everything at work has been more frustrating and exhausting – like wading through treacle. PPE is claustrophobic and it is so hard to stay adequately hydrated. Coping with the impact of cancelled exams and isolating elders is just another challenge on top of work stress. It has been very hard to stay upbeat.” (Consultant, Yorkshire)

42. “Anxiety caused by uncertainty and frequent changes in operating procedures and locations of work.” (Hospital doctor, East Midlands)

43. “This has been a time of huge challenge and uncertainty. GPs have had to drastically change the way we work and consult and have been worried about risks to ourselves, staff, patients and our own family and friends. There will be mental health issues for some considerable time after this pandemic passes, and dealing with the recovery phase is likely to be more demanding than the main part of the curve.” (GP, North West)

44. “Doctors have been expected to rise and deal with unprecedented intensity of work and stress. Working doctor couples have lost a lot of their support networks which has added to the burden. We need some time out, annual leave and recuperating time.” (GP, South East coast)

45. “I have felt stressed and anxious most days since the pandemic began. The most worrying thing has been having to make decisions about placement of vulnerable frail patients in an old Edwardian hospital with limited numbers of side rooms.” (Consultant, Scotland)

46. “I’ve experienced stress and insomnia. This was worst during the first few weeks due to uncertainty, massive changes in practices, lack of PPE and home-schooling. I’m feeling a bit better but having to work hard at maintaining mental health. I’m concerned about how stressful it will be when we need to catch up with chronic disease management.” (GP, Scotland)

47. “The fatigue after wearing PPE all day cannot be underestimated. It impacts on what I physically and mentally I could do after a shift of work. This impacts on physical and mental health if you don’t have the energy to exercise or de-stress after work.” (Consultant, Northern Ireland)

48. “I have felt really tearful on days, which I feel is as a result of anxiety for the health of my partner and myself I have been irritable and impatient. Generally, I have severe problems with sleep, I have

felt intense anger in relation to how things have been during the pandemic. I have felt betrayed, treated unfairly and left at risk due to change in guidance for adequate PPE. I have felt anxious about working outside my scope.” (Consultant, East Midlands)

49. “Extra hours and increased protective precautions are causing chronic anxiety due to the fear of catching coronavirus from the patients I deal with. The uncertainty of how long the pandemic will last, both at work and with my home life, is compounding the anxiety.” (SAS doctor, Scotland)

50. “I find it difficult to switch off mentally from work related and general Covid-19 related issues. Watching the news raises my anxiety levels.” (GP, London)

* Staff grade, associate specialist or specialty doctor