

# What Else Do You Do? Neurosurgery and Beyond: A Perspective on Trainee and Staff Well-being and Feeling Valued

Chandrasekaran Kaliaperumal

Department of Neurosurgery, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Little France, Edinburgh EH14 4SA, SCOTLAND.

## Dear Editor-in-chief

I write this letter to focus on various aspects of valuing a team and team building in this time and age where attrition is at its peak.<sup>1,2</sup> Since COVID-19 pandemic, the perspective of work ethos has changed with a significant rise in mental health issues, burn out and healthcare workers quitting their jobs across the globe.

After spending a decade as a Consultant Neurosurgeon in the National Health Service (NHS), I strongly feel that setting safe boundaries with colleagues and trainees, staff well-being and being valued as a member of the team are aspects that compliments delivering the best and safe neurosurgical care to the patients *pari passu*. As often said, it is easy to divorce one's spouse but not your colleague (if you are in a job, with a potentially long retirement period ahead!)

Being a good leader, trainer and a colleague is the part a healthy work atmosphere and one can get progressively better understanding the nuances. I have strived to focus on building my inter-personal and communication skills along with the above skills as they have played a vital role in sustaining efficient team working environment. In the early part of my career, the focus was on achieving certain targets to ensure safe career progression. The first 5 years of being a consultant was a daunting ordeal that I would describe as a silent 'call for help' to get appropriate mentoring to be a good clinician and a leader, delivering medical care with an equipoise accepting the ethereal evidence base.

I would like to quote Sir Robert Hutchison who beautifully penned the physician's prayer stating 'From inability to let well alone, from too much zeal for the new and contempt for what is old, from putting knowledge before wisdom, science before art and cleverness before common sense, from treating patients as cases and from making the cure of the disease more grievous than the endurance of the same, good Lord deliver us.'<sup>3</sup> This prayer was very useful in my medical career in understanding how medicine

has evolved over the decades and the need to remain grounded using 'common sense' approach more than accepting misleading evidence to treat patients safely. This also delivers a timeless message for the physicians of the past, present and the future.

There are a numerous established ways to achieve effective team building. I had envisaged a small team building quest in my department. Over the past 2 years, when I get an opportunity to interact with a colleague, I started to ask a question, what else do you do other than Neurosurgery or being a doctor, nurse or healthcare worker? This simple question had helped me immensely to understand my colleagues and trainees better. It was fascinating to see incredibly talented people amongst us, but it rarely or barely gets recognised as we are mainly focussed on the job what we had signed up to. One may question the need for such a question at this juncture. This simple question had changed my perspective of how I see my colleagues in a holistic way rather than them being a mere co-worker. I am also mindful of the fact that the current healthcare work force is focussed on delivering health care with limited resources, effective time utilisation and manpower.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that the residency attrition rate in neurosurgical training was found to be 10.98% with no significant change from 2005 to 2010. This rate of attrition is relatively high in Neurosurgical training when compared to other surgical specialties, although lower than reported rates for general surgery. We recently focussed on the UK Neurosurgical trainees that echoed this fact.<sup>5</sup> The question, #whatElseDoYouDo? has eventually led to multiple quality improvement projects at our unit that had helped team building, valuing staff and made work more enjoyable than it being a mere chore.

Art4All- a novel initiative gathering 10 artists from various healthcare sectors to display their artwork through Tonic Art (Scottish Charity) is currently under way and will be mirrored by several NHS units across the UK portraying talent amongst the NHS Staff. 'Enhance-DCN'-a staff well-being initiative was commenced to deliver small group interactive sessions on a twice monthly basis to promote staff well-being and team building. Over a 12-month period, around 100 staff members participated and found it very helpful breaking the Doctor-Nurse/ secretaries



DOI: 10.5530/bems.10.2.13

### Copyright Information :

Copyright Author (s) 2024 Distributed under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

Publishing Partner : EManuscript Tech. [www.emanuscript.in]

barrier. These are a couple of examples of what had changed in our department over the past 2 years.

NeusMent<sup>6</sup> is a Scottish Charity that was founded a year ago aiming to mentor medical students and neurosurgical trainees across the globe aiming to develop a holistic, well-trained and a balanced Neurosurgeon for the future. Trainees/ staff welfare can be achieved in multiple ways starting with a simple word of appreciation (Greatix) as it motivates and keep the positivity in a highly stressful work atmosphere. 'Cake-based', 'Kit-kat' or 'coffee-based' discussions have burgeoned to facilitate effective teaching and training tool in workspace environment that has brought the trainers and trainees together. Work place is often our virtual 'primary home' and having a good work-life balance, being a part of a good team, feeling valued and supported breaking various barriers (both physical and mental) are vital to evolve as a good clinician, nurse, healthcare worker, human and a good colleague after all.

I believe in my experience, it is not unreasonable or inappropriate to ask the question, #whatElseDoYouDo other than Neurosurgery? to my neurosurgical trainees, colleagues and staff without any underlying bias. This can be potentially applied to

other specialities across medicine. I do envisage an efficient team building in workspace understanding limitations and boundaries. This will also guide to focus on a better future in a holistic fashion valuing the team.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jul/01/revealed-record-170000-staff-leave-nhs-in-england-as-stress-and-workload-take-toll>. (Accessed on 20th August 2024).
2. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/12/nhs-retention-drive-expanded-across-the-country-with-thousands-fewer-staff-leaving-frontline-roles/>. (Accessed on 18th August 2024)
3. Sir Robert Hutchison. The physician's prayer. *BMJ* 1998;317 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.317.7174.1687a> (Published 19 December 1998).
4. Sharma AM, Tenny S, Yang GL, Cheng J, Ratliff JK, Steinmetz MP, *et al*. Factors affecting retirement and workforce attrition in neurosurgery: results of a Council of State Neurosurgical Societies national survey. *J Neurosurg*. 2023;140(3):839-48. doi: 10.3171/2023.7.JNS231117.
5. Salloum NL, Copley PC, Mancuso-Marcello M, Emelifeonwu J, Kaliaperumal C. Burnout amongst neurosurgical trainees in the UK and Ireland. *Acta Neurochir (Wien)*. 2021;163(9):2383-9. doi: 10.1007/s00701-021-04873-5. [www.neusment.org](http://www.neusment.org) (accessed on 17th August 2024)
6. <https://www.neusment.org>.
7. Sinton D, Lewis G, Roland D. Excellence reporting (Greatix): creating a different paradigm in improving safety and quality. *Emergency Medicine Journal* 2016;33:901-2.

### Correspondence:

**Mr. Chandrasekaran Kaliaperumal**  
Department of Neurosurgery, Royal  
Infirmary of Edinburgh, Little France,  
Edinburgh EH14 4SA, SCOTLAND.  
Email: [ckaliaperumal@gmail.com](mailto:ckaliaperumal@gmail.com)

**Received:** 17-08-2024;

**Revised:** 20-08-2024;

**Accepted:** 22-08-2024.

**Cite this article:** Kaliaperumal C. What Else Do You Do? Neurosurgery and beyond: A perspective on Trainee and staff well-being and feeling valued. *BEMS Reports*. 2024;10(2):61-2.