

The use of career guidance and career change in resolving mental illness in young doctors

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Our time together

- My background
- Information on two case histories where the doctors in question were experiencing mental ill health
- These cases raise more questions than they answer
- Shared discussion



Career guidance key moments

- Entry into med school (16 and 18)
- Half way through med school
- **At or just after qualification**
- During training
- During periods of ill health or absenteeism

... and often when someone else says you can have some (with possible stigma?)

There is not an open door policy for the provision of career guidance.



Case 1: Carrie

- Age 27, psychiatry trainee
- Did a Bsc in psychology during degree
- Struggled with F1/F2 first two years clinical
- Then started on a psychiatry scheme
- Within a few months she was off work
- Diagnosis was anxiety/depression
- Medication helped
- Two months later she returned to work
- Within two months she was off work again



Case 1: Carrie... continued

- She was referred for career guidance after a third episode of illness
- By now the cycle of return to work f/b not coping again and again was causing its own pathology
- She entered into the guidance process with enthusiasm



Case 1: Carrie... continued

- We established her reasons for attending
- career doubts/pressures from work causing stress since starting medical school
 - loved psychology it seems - the only time she felt truly passionate about her career
 - has found clinical work very unrewarding from a number of perspectives
 - life-death risks of clinical work very worrying, tends to take the worry home



Case 1: Carrie... continued

Other findings were...

- dissuaded from pursuing her interest in psychology by her parents (et al)
- exhibiting a strong need to follow something that she is passionate about
- really does not like and does not thrive in frenetic/unpredictable pace of hospital work.



Case 1: Carrie... continued

- some outstanding people skills as she is a caring person, a good listener, empathic
- but perhaps with an associated under-assertiveness
- likes any situation caring for others, animals objects, plants
- good at being well organised - she plans and is thorough
- she likes to know what she knows, what is coming and to be well prepared.



Case 1: Carrie... continued

- Psychotherapist
- Family therapist
- Psychologist
- Neuropsychologist
- CBT practitioner
- Dog breeding
- Own business - arts, crafts, tea shop
- Sports medicine
- Conservation/gardening/horticulture
- Curator/ archeologist
- Charity (eg disabled children)



Case 1: Carrie... continued

- What is she doing now?
- After serious consideration of doing a post grad psychology qualification
- She decided to start her own business marketing hand made cards and dog-walking (possibly breeding)
- She is still considering whether to pursue an animal related psychology route



Case 2: Alice

Age 30

On and off work since qualifying at 24

Still only on first rung of psychiatry training

Was referred by the deanery

Has ill health affected her medical career or
medical career affected her health more?

On medication (I was never informed what)

In midst of this she was being evicted from
the hospital and had nowhere to live

Was estranged from parents



Case 2: Alice.... continued

- We established her reasons for attending
- traditional hospital clinical work just doesn't seem to be the right environment for her to thrive and feel confident
 - on sick leave for several months and has experienced time out of the clinical career route over years due to ill health
 - struggled with medical career almost since qualifying as it doesn't fit with her full range of values, ambitions or dreams



Case 2: Alice... continued

- strong desire to be a farmer or smallholder outdoors and in touch with nature or at least in a working environment that is in harmony with nature and “hands on” (makes one wonder why medicine?)
- had a few rather grandiose ambitions (head gardener at Highgrove, olympic gymnast)
- had quite enjoyed a project in PHM which was organised for her rather than a return to clinical work for the remains of her contract



Case 2: Alice... continued

Wants:

- fun (so work doesn't feel like work!)
- feedback
- clear end points/outcomes
- goals that are challenging
- to work hard and feel involved/feedback
- to have some creative outlets at work
- security and stability of location
- a learning culture - to progress
- a work pace that is flexible/steady
- some promotion or advancement



Case 2: Alice... continued

Skills:

Very determined and persistent

A natural saleswoman

Highly creative (wrote children's book, designed own kitchen, board game at uni)

Well organised (store shed on gap year).

Very hands on and practical - loved sorting the store room, taking kids out for the day.

Problem solver through creativity - eg the board game



Case 2: Alice... continued

Shortlist:

upmarket farm shop with tea shop integral

Gardener

Sports medicine, physio, sports massage

Work with handicapped children

Farmer/smallholder

Sales roles

PHM



Case 2: Alice... continued

OUTCOME

She managed to buy a studio flat and renovate it with some savings.

Then got a part time job in a cake making firm

Then some part time gardening

She is managing financially

And is a lot happier



Lots of unanswered questions

At what point should c.g be introduced (given that it has a cost to the organisation or to the individual)?

Where is the line between mental ill health and “work induced/ mismatch”

Where has the “mistake” been made

Do these doctors have greater potential than their current careers might suggest?

What price happiness?

Do you have any questions?



Lots of unanswered questions

What can we do to stop such situations?

Can we? Should we?

What could have been done differently?

Further career guidance ideal – but who funds?

Would they want it anyway?

Two bright, well qualified individuals seemingly happier with a simpler life.

Maybe they are right!!!!

What would you suggest given these scenarios?

Did we turn over enough stones?

