

# ICU Medical Staff Wellbeing During a Pandemic

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SQA21

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## Introduction

Awareness of medical staff burnout has grown significantly over recent years and has been thrown into the limelight during the COVID-19 pandemic. Extraordinary burden has been placed on the junior members of the workforce during this time. One survey showed over half of junior doctors said they considered changing career<sup>1</sup>. Another survey demonstrated that 44% were suffering from burnout or other mental health conditions<sup>2</sup>

The aim of our survey was to assess trainee welfare and highlight areas for improvement within our intensive care unit.

## Methods

Members of the medical workforce within our intensive care unit were asked to complete an online survey in December 2020 and April 2021. Burnout was quantified using an external online survey available via the BMA website<sup>3</sup>. Our survey questions covered topics such as expectation and reality of workload, as well as working environment.

## Results

The survey was distributed to all non-consultant members of the medical team. These included registrars, core trainees, foundation doctors, clinical fellows and advanced critical care practitioners. 18 responded to the initial survey and 15 to the second. 56% reported high or very high levels of burnout in December compared to 47% in April. No-one reported low burnout at either time point. The majority found the workload to be as expected or higher. Morning intensive care teaching was highlighted as a positive aspect of the working environment in our ICU, while the lack of break spaces was a negative factor.

### Brew and a Vent

Inaugural ITU coffee afternoon and bake sale

Come for a coffee and a chat, bake some cakes

All proceeds go to this month's charity



7th July 2021  
12pm-2:30pm  
ICU Seminar room



Fig. 2 poster advertising the first "Brew and a vent" coffee afternoon to promote wellbeing



Fig. 3 Members of staff across the MDT attending the event

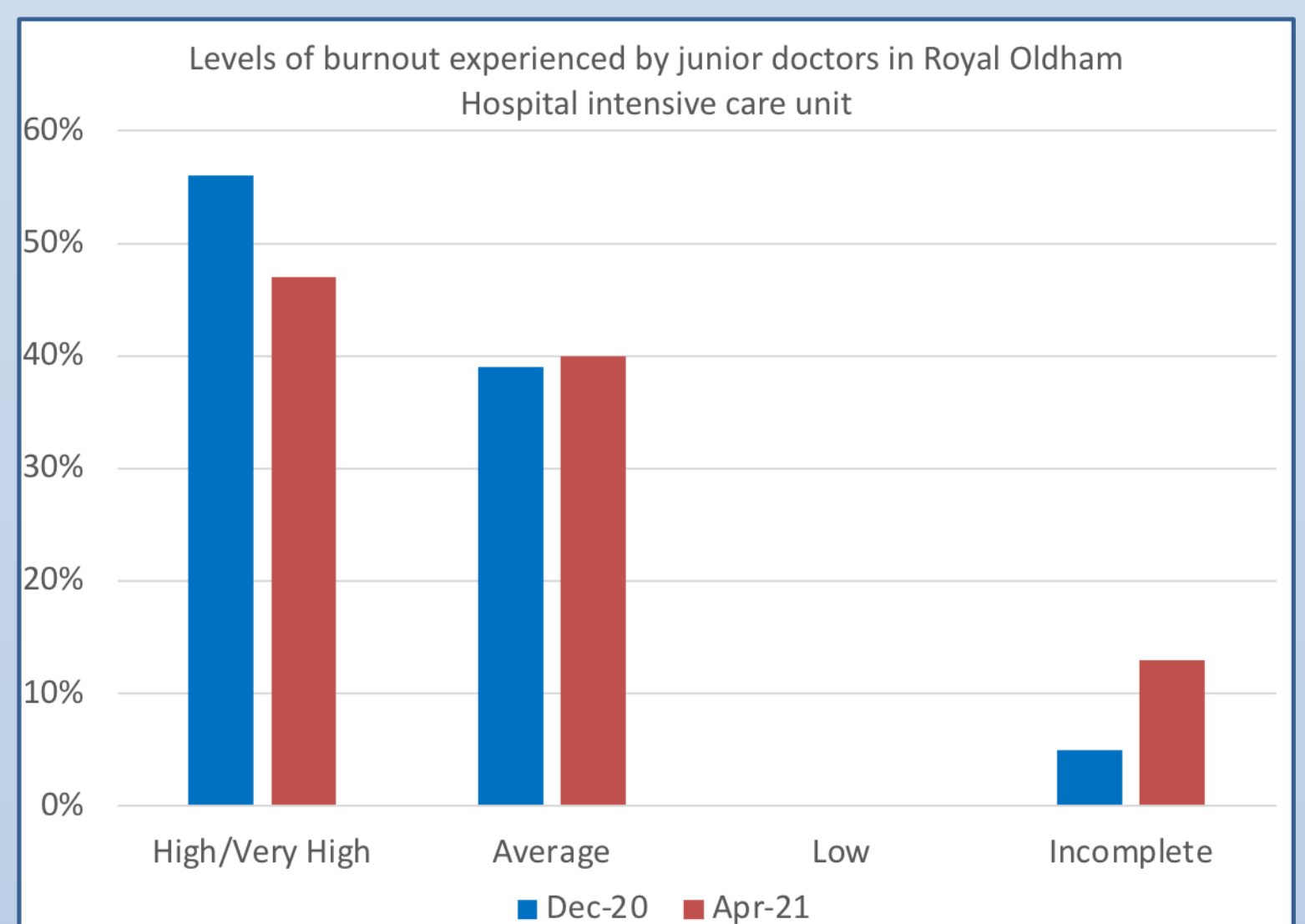


Fig. 1 Graph illustrating levels of burn out amongst medical staff in Oldham intensive care unit during December 2020 and April 2021 as calculated using the BMA burnout questionnaire

## Discussion

The findings from our survey correlated with wider national surveys. Although burnout levels improved slightly between December 2020 and April 2021, there is still a long way to go to get this to an acceptable level. Factors that play into this include the workload expectation. More senior members of the team found the workload to be higher than initially expected. One of the factors causing this disparity was that they were expected to supervise others, often those who had been re-deployed from non-ICU specialties with limited experience of critical care. Since these surveys, the out of hours staffing has been increased with the aim to improve the workload burden.

Strict social distancing rules resulted in break space capacity being severely reduced. Room capacity restrictions created a divide between nursing and medical staff as they had no area to share break periods. A coffee afternoon (Brew and a Vent) was organised to bring the team back together, modelled on the Coffee and a Gas scheme from the Association of Anaesthetists<sup>4</sup>.

The team felt galvanised by regular morning teaching which has resulted in the employment of a senior trainee (ICM ST6) to coordinate this going forward. There is clearly large scope for improvement with regards to staff wellbeing, but small steps have been made in the right direction. Our surveys have shown that small interventions can go a long way to improving staff morale, especially when the suggestions for change have come from the juniors themselves.

## References

- 1) Bloomer A. More than half of doctors considering new career due to burnout. Geriatric Medicine Journal, <https://www.gmjjournal.co.uk/more-than-half-of-doctors-considering-new-career-due-to-burnout> (2020, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021).
- 2) BMA. Stress and burnout warning over COVID-19. <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/stress-and-burnout-warning-over-covid-19> (2020, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021).
- 3) BMA. Wellbeing support services burnout questionnaire. <https://questionnaires.bma.org.uk/burnout-questionnaire/?OpenForm> (2020, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021)
- 4) Coffee and a Gas, Association of anaesthetists, <https://anaesthetists.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Wellbeing/CoffeeGas.pdf?ver=2020-11-09-100833-577> (2021, Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2021)