

Report - Forum for Integrated Healthcare

Burn Out

24th June St Thomas's Hospital, London

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The forum held its first meeting on 24th June at St Thomas's Hospital. The topic was 'Burn Out' with PETER FENWICK and BART VAN DER LUGT.

Those of us who have chosen to work as providers of health care can often find we are both emotionally and physically exhausted with little left to give. We may find ourselves questioning whether our choices to care bring more harm than good.

With this in mind, Peter set the scene for 'Burn Out'. He outlined the different stages of physical and emotional depletion that can lead to feelings of disconnection, isolation and ill health, culminating in crisis. Peter saw this as 'spiritual bankruptcy'. There was acknowledgment of the games we play, the lies we tell ourselves and how often we don't say 'no' because we feel we are indispensable! How everyday tasks like mowing a lawn can become a chore rather than a pleasure!

We had started our morning by making a list of activities that reflect how our time is spent. It was perhaps of little surprise that work featured at the top of most lists. Bart later asked us to make a new list, this time with the question "If we had only three months to live, how would we choose to spend our time"? For many there was a significant gap between the two lists and we reflected upon how we might draw them closer together. Perhaps with the ongoing thought, "am I ready to die", strengthened by Peter's reminder, "the only moment lit is the present one".

After lunch we worked in small groups, each person taking a turn to respond to and witness the three questions: 1) What kind of life suits you? 2) What is your dream? 3) What is real and genuine for you? Aside from consolidating our priorities, we realised that these three questions merged into one and our responses became simple and heartfelt: 'joy and peace' in our group.

We considered what Peter termed 'recovery', how do we mourn the loss of negative, addictive behaviour patterns such as our need to be 'needed', constantly busy and indispensable! Techniques such as 'pauses', a short meditation between patients were practised.

Finally Bart reflected upon his own experiences and recalled how there was nothing worse for him than working with a feeling of 'clipped wings'. Leaving a restricted and changed working environment enabled him to feel he had recovered his sense of 'flight' and once more, could be fully alive in the moment.

This sense of liberation was I think felt by everyone after this extraordinary day. With thanks to Bart and Peter and all those who shared it.