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The **RMBF** Newsletter

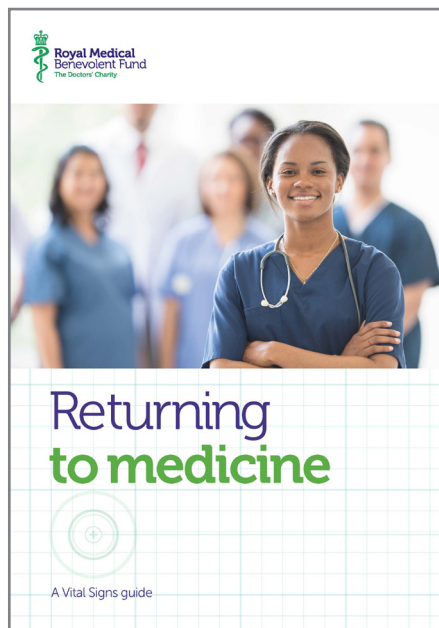
## Returning to Medicine

New guide in Vital Signs series out now

We are pleased to announce the launch of *Returning to Medicine: A Vital Signs Guide*, a new resource to help doctors looking to return to practice after illness or a break.

Many doctors who have had a break from practice experience anxiety, guilt, imposter syndrome and other issues. The new guide helps returning doctors to explore those difficult feelings and realise that a break can be enriching. It also signposts many sources of practical support accessible to doctors.

The guide is written by Dr Richard Stevens FRCGP, RMBF Trustee, Associate Director and Coach at the Thames Valley Professional Support Unit, and author of the previous guides in the *Vital Signs* series. Its advice is based on stories and experiences kindly shared by doctors who have returned to medicine, recounting the issues they faced and what support was helpful to them.



“In recent years, we’ve seen a real increase in demand for back-to-work support,” said RMBF Chief Executive Steve Crone. “We’ve helped address this with our successful volunteer-led Coach Mentoring programme, and I’m really pleased that we’re now adding another useful resource in this area.

“After the disruption and difficulty caused by the pandemic, doctors returning to work are likely to be facing even more of a tough time. So I think

this guide is really well-timed, and we’ve already had feedback from doctors saying that it addresses a real need in the profession.”

*Returning to Medicine*, as well as the other *Vital Signs* guides, can be downloaded for free: scan the QR code or visit [rmbf.org/vitalsigns](https://rmbf.org/vitalsigns). Print copies will also be available soon – email [info@rmbf.org](mailto:info@rmbf.org) if you are interested in getting hold of some.

Our thanks to BMA Giving, whose support has made the production of this helpful new resource possible.



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This year we helped

**56 doctors**

to return to work or remain  
in work – an increase of  
37% on last year



# CEO update

Steve Crone | RMBF Chief Executive

**While the UK opens up and some normality returns for many of us,** it is important to remember that doctors on the frontline face multiple long-term challenges. While the Covid vaccination programme has been very effective in reducing severe disease and hospital admissions, figures are currently rising and the NHS is likely to face significant challenges this winter. On an individual level, doctors have faced strains on their physical and mental health that will have long-lasting repercussions. And the backlog of non-urgent care that has had to be postponed is still waiting in the wings.

## Mental health needs

Throughout this issue, you will see some statistics outlining our work to support doctors and medical students during the 2020-21 financial year. That is a full year in which the medical profession faced the Covid pandemic head on, and we are seeing quite clearly the impact it has had. One key indicator is that DocHealth has had its busiest year yet of providing confidential psychotherapeutic support.

However, by looking at emerging trends, and with your kind support, we can be there to provide the help that doctors need, now and in the future. On page 8 you can read about our plans to support doctors with post-traumatic stress disorder and moral injury, two pressing areas for the profession, interrelated but presenting their own challenges.

## Returning to Medicine

As you'll see on the front cover, our programme of back-to-work support for doctors has another string to its bow in the form of our new guide, *Returning to Medicine*. Please do give it a read – even if its advice does not apply to you right now, I am sure that you can think of a medical colleague who might benefit, so why not send them the link? We are also looking to add further back-to-work support to our website's Doctor Advice Hub. New articles are always shared on our social media accounts, so don't forget to follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for the latest.

Another key resource for beneficiaries wishing to return to practice is our

volunteer-led Coach Mentoring. One beneficiary told us of her experience: “[My Coach Mentor] really helped me to see how valuable and transferable my skills and experience were, at a time when I was unable to see that for myself. I felt like she really believed in me which really helped with my confidence. She was very kind and approachable and it was very easy to be open and honest with her ... the coaching has been so useful.”

Thank you to our Coach Mentors, and to all of our volunteers, who do truly invaluable work to ensure that those facing hardship can access support when they need it most.

## Research update

One area making great progress is our research project into unmet need in the medical profession, undertaken by the Research Department of Medical Education at UCL Medical School. It aims to explore the causes and extent of financial hardship amongst doctors, medical students and their families, and understand how we as a charity might best support them.

The research team have established an Advisory Group to inform the project, with members including external academics and experts as well as RMBF beneficiaries, trustees, and volunteers. Recently they have carried out a specialist literature review, and interviews with experts in the area; the next stage involves interviewing RMBF beneficiaries, as well as those who didn't approach the charity but



might have benefited from our support, to understand more of their personal experience.

The findings of this important research will help to inform the future direction of the charity, and I look forward to sharing more with you as the project develops.

## Final words

I wanted to leave you with a few words of thanks from a beneficiary who we were able to help as part of our refugee doctor programme. We provided financial support while they were studying for the PLAB2 exam which would allow them to practise in the UK.

They said: “Not only has this fund helped me financially, but has given me that peace of mind not to worry about the costs of things that will help me in my future goals ... I have been able to pay for my clinical attachment, exam fees and online exam subscriptions. I apologise for taking my time to send this email as I kept postponing it because of my PLAB2 exam – thankfully I have passed.”

It's not an exaggeration to say that your kind donations have helped to change this doctor's life. And with your ongoing support, we will be able to do the same for hundreds of doctors and medical students every year – regardless of how long we are faced with the impact of this pandemic. That, I think, is a good reason to keep optimistic.

With all good wishes

**Steve**

# The year in figures: 2020-21

**270** beneficiaries received financial help



**140** doctors and medical students received financial help

**70** of those were new beneficiaries this year

**130** further family members benefited from financial help

**£478,156**

total financial impact for our beneficiaries, including RMBF grants and state benefits secured by our money advice service

**£72,313**

went towards relieving hardship caused by the impact of Covid-19, thanks to donations from CHSA, BMA Giving and the Healthcare Workers' Foundation

**72**

doctors received expert money advice to help them out of difficult financial situations

**76**

medical students received specialist help from our online student money adviser service

**12**

beneficiaries were provided with telephone befriending to help combat loneliness

## DocHealth

Our confidential psychotherapeutic support service, provided in partnership with the BMA  
[dochealth.org.uk](http://dochealth.org.uk)



**392** doctors received help from DocHealth in 2020-21 – the highest yearly figure since the service's launch in 2016



Of all doctors helped since 2016:

- **81%** had significant anxiety
- **48%** had significant depression
- **84%** were at high or very high risk of burnout



**92%** of DocHealth users would recommend the service to others

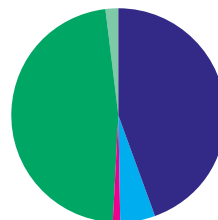


**131,000**

views of our online Advice Hub articles

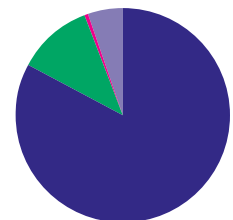
## Finances

Year ended 31 March 2021



### Income

**Donations** £532,487  
**Legacies** £62,916  
**Trading** £12,882  
**Investment income** £565,392  
**Other** £22,290  
**Total** £1,195,967



### Expenditure

**Charitable activities** £1,229,669  
**Generating future income** £166,865  
**Trading** £7,908  
**Other** £76,355  
**Total** £ 1,480,797



# Wellbeing in focus: social anxiety

**After a year in lockdown, a return to social situations will be a huge relief for many of us.** But for those who experience social anxiety, it may well be more of a mixed blessing.

The team behind Rightsteps, our free online wellbeing resource, have put together some information and advice for dealing with social anxiety.

## What is social anxiety?

We all experience anxiety. Anxiety often helps us to do better; many professional athletes use their anxiety in order to improve their performance. A bit of anxiety can speed up our reactions and provide us with instant energy. But too much anxiety can also take away our confidence.

Social anxiety is more than feeling a bit anxious or shy. Social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, is a long-term and overwhelming fear of social situations. It can leave us feeling excessively anxious of being judged, e.g. when meeting new people or speaking in front of others.

Social anxiety can be very distressing and have a big impact on our life; it affects everyday activities, confidence, relationships and work or school life. We may feel anxious just thinking about these situations and avoid them altogether.

Signs and symptoms of social anxiety can include persistent:

- Fear of situations in which you may be judged or criticised (e.g. when making presentations)
- Worrying that others will notice that you look anxious (e.g. if you appear sweating, blushing, or having a shaky voice) and think negatively of you



- Worrying about embarrassing or humiliating yourself in front of others
- Intense fear of interacting or talking with new people (e.g. dating)
- Avoiding being 'the centre of attention' in meetings
- Intense fear and anxiety during speaking or performing in public (or even thinking about doing this)
- Spending time after a social situation 'analysing' your performance and identifying mistakes and flaws in your interactions

## Top tips

### Avoid avoidance

When feeling anxious, you may want to avoid or run away from situations that are making you feel tense. The more you avoid these situations, the more your anxiety and fear will keep going.

### Stay with the anxiety

Set a realistic time to stay in a slightly fearful situation for (e.g. ten minutes). Keep staying in this situation until you are comfortable in it (this may take five attempts or more). Once comfortable in this situation, celebrate your efforts. Acknowledging your successes can keep you going. Then, move on to a situation that is making you a bit more anxious, and so on. Follow the same steps again.

### Challenge your thinking

When feeling socially anxious, you may believe that others will judge you negatively: "They'll think I'm stupid" etc. The truth is, just because you think something, doesn't mean it's true. Such thoughts may seem believable but they are often unrealistic and unhelpful.

### Drop your safety behaviours

We often use 'safety behaviours' in order to reduce our anxiety (e.g. hair over face when talking, avoiding eye contact, fiddling with something or tensing up to hide our shaking, using alcohol or drugs to increase our confidence etc.). Try to gradually drop your safety behaviours one at a time. You can find out that there is nothing to fear and that you can cope without them, no matter what the situation.

*Social anxiety is just one of the issues that Rightsteps can help with. Access a wide range of information and advice to help you look after your physical and mental health. Scan the QR code or visit:*

**[rightsteps.co.uk/customers/rmbf](https://rightsteps.co.uk/customers/rmbf)**



**379 people**

accessed help from Rightsteps, our online wellbeing resource, this year



**40 people**

signed up for Wellbeing Sessions, structured courses offering more in-depth, self-guided support



# Why I volunteer: Conor's story

**Dr Conor Tufts is a junior doctor and RMBF volunteer based in Cornwall.**

He joined the RMBF's volunteer network as one of the first medical student volunteers, helping to raise our profile among his fellow students in Exeter. In 2017 he coined the title and hashtag #MedStudentsMatter for our campaign highlighting pressure on medical students. He has since qualified as a doctor and continues to be a keen and active volunteer, spreading the word about the support the RMBF can offer.

**We asked Conor what the RMBF means to him.**

**There's no doubt that almost every person experiences stress, or some financial worry, at some point in their lives due to work.** Perhaps you can remember how this feels: it can be a lonely and deeply hurtful experience. For many, this starts in university, where thousands of students take on thousands in debt, and deal with new physical and mental challenges out of their usual environments.

I would argue that in terms of stress, degrees that train doctors are among the worst offenders in the education system. Every medical student or doctor has more than a handful of stories about the experiences and hardships of our training that would deeply shock people outside the medical 'bubble'. It's not surprising to me that a 2018 RMBF survey found 60% of medical students reported financial difficulties during their training, with 41% considering dropping out as a result. Indeed, 68% of medical students reported significant mental health pressures. And sadly, 59% feel that the stigma of reaching out for help would stop them doing so.

It was a chance email received during my time at medical school that alerted me to the great work the RMBF does every

year helping doctors, and indeed medical students, to succeed in their careers by supporting them financially and mentally. It just seemed to 'fill the gap' of support that I felt was needed in my cohort and peers.

It would be fair of you to ask "why this charity?". Undoubtedly there are many worthy causes to which I could donate my time. For me, this story goes back a little further.

When I was nine years old my mother was told, in the early hours of the morning after a night spent in two different hospitals, that her son had blood cancer (leukaemia). She was told he was seriously unwell, and there was a real chance he might not survive.

As a child it took me nearly three years of treatment to realise the extent and seriousness of my illness – my mother had to make decisions about my treatment within hours. This was an illness that didn't just affect me, but the extensive family that supported and cared for me during that time.

I could write to tell you of the interesting stories and experiences that I had during my treatment, like sneaking back across the English Channel with

*Left: Hiding the nerves during third year of medical school. Below: Early days of treatment, circa 2005. Above right: Medical graduation, 2019 – a happy day.*



chickenpox, thinking I'd vomited up my whole stomach and losing my vision, or scaring other children at school with my Hickman line. Or I could sit here and type a list, longer than the wordcount I've been given, of people who helped me and my family.

What matters is that chief among those are the medical professionals who saved my life.

This year we recruited  
**25 new  
volunteers**

We currently have over 200  
volunteers supporting our  
work across the UK



So how does this link to the RMBF?

Because I and my family were supported medically and psychologically back into living a normal life, I was able to continue with school, GCSEs and A-levels. And continue to live my life pursuing the pleasures and goals that I always wanted to, resulting in training to be a doctor myself. It strikes me that the RMBF are doing almost exactly this for our working doctors and medical students, and their families.

In short – doctors supported me to not just survive, but live. If we support doctors and those in training, we're not only supporting them and their families, but their patients, their patients' families, and ultimately – life.

That's why I support the RMBF.

Thank you for reading,

**Conor**



# Every Mile For Our NHS

**Throughout one of the wettest Mays on record**, medical students across the UK came together (virtually) in the Every Mile For Our NHS fundraising campaign.

Whether they chose to run, cycle, swim or even rollerblade, neither sore legs nor frequent downpours could dampen the enthusiasm of the dozens of fundraisers taking part across 18 medical schools. Their tireless efforts raised over £9,000 for the RMBF, the Cavell Nurses' Trust, and Doctors in Distress.

We've caught up with some of the students who got involved and found out more about their experience taking part.



## Lucy Rogers

**Campaign creator and graduate in medicine, University of Bristol**

"Supporting the wonderful work of the RMBF is a cause that I am very passionate about. In February, I had passed my finals and my overseas elective was cancelled. With several calmer months ahead of me before starting work as a junior doctor, I had the idea to launch this fundraiser.

Medical students from across the country rarely get the opportunity to come together. Too often we are encouraged to view each other as competition. One of my main aims with the campaign was to offer a vehicle that united students from different medical schools, in aid of our frontline colleagues who have selflessly put their physical and mental health on the line to protect the public during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I set myself the personal challenge of cycling 883 miles throughout May, in

recognition of the 883 health and social care workers who died from Covid during the first wave.

Unsurprisingly, the challenge tested me both physically and mentally, particularly thanks to the relentless rain that meant I spent more time damp than dry! It did though remind me of my inner strength and resilience which, like many people, I sometimes find myself doubting.

At first I thought that recruiting and encouraging fundraisers remotely would be hard, but I was overwhelmed by how quickly over 60 people signed up. It was a perfect reminder of how in life, we are stronger together than we are apart.

A huge thanks to the amazing Steph at the RMBF for her continued encouragement and belief, and my wonderful co-organiser Joe (*see below*). I am already looking forward to my next fundraising effort for the RMBF!"



## Joe Sullivan

**Co-organiser and graduate in medicine, University of Leeds**

"Lucy, who I'd met through my intercalation, got in touch just after I'd finished my finals with an idea to support our incredible NHS staff, who despite the pandemic had not only continued to look after the general public, but also continued to provide us with the high-quality education we needed to qualify as doctors.

With Lucy in the South and me in the North, we reached out to med school representatives and student organisations. Between us we assembled

a great team who were just as keen as us to go the extra mile!

The challenge I set myself was to run every day in May. Rather than setting myself a distance, my daily run would represent the resilience and perseverance of NHS staff. Despite the weather, I thoroughly enjoyed pushing myself through and being part of it. Thank you so much to everyone involved, everyone who donated, and to the RMBF for the work you do!"



## Alex Irving

**University of Aberdeen medical student and President, Aberdeen Medics RFC**

"23 of our club members volunteered to run for an hour each over the course of 24 hours – last year's President running the double leg. With a month to prepare and a significant lack of fitness, this was always going to be a big ask. On the day however, we came together and pushed each other to run a collective 242km.

Personally I woke up for my comfortable 8am time slot uncomfortably late and, after gulping down some energy drinks, set off in a bit of a rush. Spurred on by AC/DC's "Thunderstruck", I managed to cover 11km over the hour, representing my fellow front-rowers well.

Both I and my fellow runners were undoubtedly inspired by our personal experiences of loss during the pandemic. Whether lost loved ones, lost jobs, or lost opportunities, we each have our own stories.

We are all extremely grateful for the work of our mentors during this time, and are proud to be future clinicians. If we were able to help even one person with the money we raised, then our run was a definite success."



## Lucy Hill

**Deputy Medical Education Manager (Undergraduate), University Hospitals Bristol & Weston NHS Foundation Trust**

“The picture is of me (with sunglasses), my dad Andrew, and my younger sister Harriet. We completed the Vitality London 10km run together as the last part of our Every Mile challenge.

I got involved through my work. Alongside my job share partner and our

team of fabulous administrators and Clinical Teaching Fellows, my job is to provide clinical placements and teaching for medical students at the University of Bristol. I wanted to support not just the amazing doctors and staff working for the NHS, but future doctors too.

I am immensely proud of the medical students we help to support through their degrees – they are resilient, kind, caring and have shown such positivity in such a difficult time.”



## Madeleine Upham

**Third year medical student, University of Liverpool**

“I swam, cycled and ran 206km during May. Having seen the conditions that NHS healthcare staff have had to contend with during the pandemic, I wanted to be able to give back somehow. It was frustrating that I couldn’t help in a practical way during the pandemic, as I had limited clinical skills and was studying online throughout.

I’m grateful for this challenge as it helped me contribute, and it helped me keep active during intense revision time at the end of the academic year, too. I really enjoyed getting creative with my running and cycling routes around Liverpool.”

**A gigantic thank you to everyone who took part – your incredible efforts will make a huge difference to the lives of doctors and medical students in need.**

# Self-care October

## Where wellbeing meets fundraising

### Are you overdue a self-care day?

Looking after our wellbeing feels more important now than ever. We all find ourselves juggling different aspects of our lives – balancing being a parent with the demands of a busy job, perhaps. Sadly, self-care is often the first thing we drop when we have too much on, but paying attention to ourselves and our needs should be a priority, not a luxury.

That’s why this October, we’re asking you to host an event based on an activity that makes you feel good and gives you a chance to recharge – all while helping raise valuable funds for doctors in need.

We’ll be hosting special RMBF live-streams (see below) but in the meantime, here are some suggestions to kick off your inspiration!

### Get cooking

There are a host of activities you can do to treat your tastebuds and nourish your body. Is there a particular dish you’ve been complimented on a lot? Meet up and teach friends the recipe in exchange for a donation to the RMBF. Or you could



host a dinner party and ask your guests to donate what they would have paid in a restaurant.

### Get crafty

What better way to relax and stimulate your imagination than hosting a crafts night? A creative skill like painting or candle-making is another good one to teach people as a fundraiser. The calming powers of knitting are well-known – why not start a knitting circle with some friends and buy each other’s finished products as a donation?

### Get active

Get together and get your hearts racing with some Zumba dance classes, or

slow down the pace with a yoga session. There are a wealth of great exercise videos on YouTube, and you could also try reaching out to local instructors. In nice weather, you could host it in a local park or garden. Just ask your guests to donate to the RMBF.

### Get reading

Is there a nicer way to switch off than giving yourself the time to dive into a book? If you are part of a book club, you could suggest a medical themed book when it’s your turn to choose, and encourage donations. Caroline Elton’s *Also Human: The Inner Lives of Doctors* is an excellent example.

### Self-care Sunday

To go along with your own fabulous activities, on **October 17** we’ll be live-streaming a special programme of RMBF wellbeing sessions. Hosted by experts, these will be free to join with the option of making a donation. More details will be announced very soon.

If you’re already fizzing with ideas for a fundraiser, we’d love to hear your plans! Scan the QR code below or visit [rmbf.org/selfcareoctober](https://rmbf.org/selfcareoctober) to let us know about your event. You’ll also find handy fundraising tools, plus all the details of our special livestreams as they are announced.





# RMBF to launch programme for PTSD and moral injury support

**We are very pleased to announce that the RMBF has been awarded a £25,000 BMA Giving grant to help support doctors facing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Over the past year and a half, medics working on the frontline have come face-to-face with astonishing levels of death and suffering, and it has unsurprisingly taken its toll. Research by King's College



London in 2020 showed that nearly 40% of ICU and anaesthetic staff reported symptoms consistent with a probable diagnosis of PTSD – more than double pre-pandemic levels. PTSD can also take time to present, with triggers happening years after the initial trauma.

Those who were unable to work treating patients, often because of their own health conditions, have faced separate but related challenges. On top of the mental exhaustion of shielding, there is a risk of moral injury, related to feelings of guilt due to not helping patients and their colleagues during a national crisis. Moral injury can also be caused by excessive workloads during the pandemic, when doctors feel they have not been able to give the high standard of care they naturally want to deliver.

Doctors facing these issues often need to reduce their hours or take time away from work, in order to access essential mental health treatment. Ending up on reduced sick pay, or being out of work entirely if a contract ends, can leave doctors struggling to make ends meet – adding more stress to what may already be an overwhelming situation.

In order to alleviate hardship for doctors faced with these issues, and to help address their long-term impact on the

profession, the RMBF is very grateful to have secured funding from BMA Giving to support doctors in financial hardship who are specifically facing PTSD and moral injury.

The RMBF website will host further information and support on these issues, and we will aim to raise awareness among doctors who may not recognise the signs of PTSD or moral injury, encouraging them to reach out for help.

Our thanks once again to BMA Giving for awarding this grant. Thanks also to you, our supporters – your generous donations throughout this pandemic have ensured that our support for beneficiaries has continued uninterrupted, and that we can continue developing what we offer to doctors in need by undertaking initiatives like this.

*If you or a colleague are finding things hard due to mental health concerns, please email [help@rmbf.org](mailto:help@rmbf.org) to see whether you may be eligible for support.*

## Our second virtual AGM

**The 2021 RMBF Annual General Meeting will take place online via Zoom on 20 September 2021.**

While we are keen to get back to running events in person, the safety of attendees is foremost in our minds, and so the decision has been made to host this year's event virtually.

Holding last year's event online resulted in some advantages, including increased accessibility for those outside of London. Plans for next year are not yet set but we hope to retain some of the benefits of remote meeting if possible.

Volunteers and life members should have received their invitation by the time this newsletter arrives, so if yours is missing, please just email [info@rmbf.org](mailto:info@rmbf.org).

## In memoriam: Ms Rajo Reginald

**In May, we were saddened to learn of the death of longstanding supporter Ms Rajo Reginald, who died on 2 January this year.**

For over a decade, Rajo was the Secretary of the RMBF's Windsor & District Guild. "The local live wire" in the words of one friend, she showed great dedication to supporting the RMBF locally, and thoroughly enjoyed the role.



We are incredibly grateful for Rajo's contribution to supporting doctors in need. Our condolences to her husband Mr Philip Reginald, and all of her family and friends.

Graphics in this issue use images made by Pixel Perfect, Freepik, Zlatko Najdenovski, prettycons and bqlqn from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)