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The **RMBF** Newsletter

The fight against burnout

Doctors under pressure can access financial and wellbeing support - thanks to your donations

Over the past decade, it has become more and more widely accepted that not only is burnout a legitimate condition, but that its effect on doctors is one of the biggest challenges facing the medical profession.

Even before the Covid pandemic, there was widespread concern about how badly burnout can hurt the wellbeing of doctors and their fellow health professionals, as well as the subsequent impact on patient care.

We don't yet fully know just how much the last two years have contributed to the problem. Unsurprisingly though, early signs show that much more support will be needed to prevent doctors from burning out entirely and leaving the profession for good.

Fortunately, you can help. In the fight against burnout, your kind donations make an enormous difference, by helping to provide hardship grants, mental health services and wellbeing support.

Of the doctors and medical students awarded support at our Grants & Awards Committee meetings, nearly half are facing hardship caused by mental health difficulties including burnout.



Most of the doctors who receive financial support from the RMBF are also early on in their careers – three-quarters are under 40. They have not yet built up a financial safety net, and being left unable to work by burnout can quickly mean struggling to pay the mortgage, bills, or childcare costs.

When burnout strikes hard, your donations help doctors keep on an even keel while they recover. But they also contribute to vital early-intervention services like DocHealth, the confidential psychotherapeutic support service we support with the BMA. Recent surveys indicate that nearly 90% of doctors accessing DocHealth were at high or very high risk of burnout.

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Donations from RMBF supporters played a crucial role in getting the service up and running in 2016, and since then your support has helped ensure that it remains available to all UK doctors, regardless of their ability to pay. By accessing support early on, before things begin to spiral, doctors can avoid the potential longer-term, more serious effects of burnout.

If you're struggling with burnout, see Page 7 for more on dealing with the condition and accessing support.

CEO update

Steve Crone | RMBF Chief Executive

Whenever our Grants & Awards Committee meets, I'm always particularly moved when I read the messages and updates from our beneficiaries. These are the doctors, medical students and family members we've been able to help, thanks to the generosity of supporters like you.

Transforming lives

Every person whose situation is discussed at these meetings is an individual, each sadly facing their own particular set of hardships. It's by understanding those circumstances, and offering a tailored package of financial help, money advice, and other support, that the committee can ensure your donations make a transformative difference.

Your support could be the difference between a medical student making it through those particularly intense last couple of years of study, or being forced to leave their course through financial hardship. It could mean a doctor being able to return to work and continue their career after a serious injury or illness, by helping with retraining and exam fees to ensure their clinical skills are up to date.

Or, as you can read in Dr Hamilton's story on page 5, that support may mean being able to keep a roof over your head. It is difficult to imagine just how stressful it must be to worry you might lose your home. But it is so rewarding to be able to play a part in dispelling that worry, and helping somebody feel safe and secure again.

The statistics bear out that our support really does work. 70% of our new beneficiaries return to work or no longer need help within one year, and 85% within two years. I'm so grateful to you, all our RMBF supporters and volunteers, for enabling us to genuinely change the lives of doctors who are struggling.

Examining burnout

This newsletter has a particular focus on burnout. It's an issue that has impacted the profession for many years, but the pandemic has intensified the problem and left many more doctors at risk.

However, while it seems the prevalence of burnout is increasing, so too is the profession's understanding of the condition, and the acceptance of how serious it can be.

More generally, we have seen an increasing demand in this area, with around half of our beneficiaries needing help because of mental health issues. Our website Advice Hubs have recently been updated with useful articles on issues including burnout, stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and moral injury. They cover how to recognise the signs and symptoms, as well as where to seek further help; I do recommend having a look.

A vital service

I am always pleased to update you on the progress of DocHealth, the confidential psychotherapeutic service for doctors that the RMBF and BMA established in 2016. Though it's only six years old, DocHealth has expanded its capacity to the point of helping hundreds of doctors a year, with the last two years being its busiest yet (see page 4).

One of its greatest benefits is accessibility – the self-referral model helps doctors overcome the stigma of asking for help. Fees are also based on ability to pay, with donations from RMBF supporters directly funding sessions for those who might otherwise not be able to afford them.

Fit for the future

DocHealth is an excellent example of how your support has helped us provide a new resource, one that helps to meet the changing needs of a medical profession under strain. But we are always on the lookout for other ways we can expand our support in a way that anticipates future pressures.



That was the impetus behind the major research project that we undertook with the help of UCL Medical School. Its subject is the nature and extent of unmet need amongst doctors, medical students and their families, with a particular focus on the barriers preventing potential beneficiaries coming forwards, and how we can reach these beneficiaries earlier before times of real crisis.

The findings of this important piece of research will be published in the late summer, and RMBF staff and Trustees will meet for a strategy day in the autumn informed by those findings. I look forward to sharing further updates on how this research helps shape our future direction.

An autumn treat

Tickets are now on sale for the European Doctors Orchestra's concert in aid of the RMBF, at Cadogan Hall in London on Sunday 9 October. They'll be playing Walton, Shostakovich and Berlioz – turn to the back page for the full music programme and ticket details. EDO President and Violist Dr Diana Cassell also kindly spoke to us about what playing music together can do for doctors' wellbeing, on page 6.

We're very grateful to the EDO for choosing to support the RMBF, and providing a lovely occasion for RMBF's supporters and volunteers to meet up and catch up after such a long while. By coming along, you'll be helping us make it a huge fundraising success for doctors in need. So do snap up your tickets – and why not tell a friend?

With all good wishes
Steve

Planning ahead together: our Volunteer Conference

On 7 June, RMBF volunteers from around the country met at the Wellcome Collection in London for our second ever national Volunteer Conference.

The day's focus was on forward thinking and strategy, and how the RMBF's volunteer network can push towards an important, ambitious goal: ensuring every single doctor and medical student in the UK knows about the RMBF, and the support we can offer them in hard times.

Volunteers were welcomed by RMBF President, Professor Sheila the Baroness Hollins, and Chair, Professor Michael Farthing, who celebrated the long-awaited opportunity to enjoy getting together in person again, and the "spark" that this contributes to discussion and collaboration.

An important first step in reaching doctors in need is to understand the challenges they face day-to-day: not just recent pressures related to the pandemic, but longer-term issues like a lack of comfortable rest spaces, and



the inherent toughness of medicine as a career. RMBF Trustee and author of *The Vital Signs* guides, Dr Richard Stevens, delivered a wide-ranging keynote covering these issues and more, with a focus on how doctors can maintain their wellbeing to cope with these challenges.

Burnout was a key theme: Richard noted that a list of risk factors for burnout (e.g. lack of control, unclear expectations, work-life imbalance) bears similarity to a junior doctors' job description. However, even if the risk of burnout has increased, so has the acceptance that it is a legitimate condition and not a sign that doctors "can't cope".

It was not all doom and gloom, and Richard noted that even at such a difficult time, positivity is not only welcome but actively helpful. Having a strong sense of purpose, as most doctors do, can be hugely beneficial to wellbeing.

Insightful questions from attendees touched on how we can help address the structural issues that affect doctors' wellbeing, such as insufficient resources and time for refreshment (one study showing that junior doctors in ICU were more likely to be dehydrated than their patients). Chief Executive Steve Crone noted in response that while the RMBF cannot be party political, it can and does

advocate for changes that will benefit doctors' wellbeing.

A nourishing lunch was served with a special violin performance from Dr Max Pitcher of the European Doctors' Orchestra (see pages 6 and 8).

In the afternoon volunteer Dr John Phillips, a member of the RMBF Grants & Awards Committee, gave a presentation underlining the vital importance of financial support for struggling doctors. Student volunteer Hattie Coleman, who organised fundraising events in memory of her late friend Ottie, could not be there on the day but gave top tips on successful fundraising via video.

Over recent years, changes in the needs of RMBF applicants and beneficiaries have led to a re-focusing of the volunteer programme's aims, with fundraising and awareness raising now the two key priorities. Spurred on by Head of Fundraising & Communications Claire Andersen, groups shared ideas and strategies for fundraising events, and decided on concrete actions they could take after the conference to help spread the word.

A huge thank you to all our volunteers and guests for their enthusiasm and expertise – we look forward to seeing you at the next one!



Clockwise from above: Dr Richard Stevens delivers the keynote presentation; our venue for the day; heads together for the icebreaker quiz; volunteer Hattie Coleman's video presentation; the EDO's Dr Max Pitcher entertains guests over lunch.



The year in figures: 2021-22

Your donations helped **310** beneficiaries this year



Online help & advice

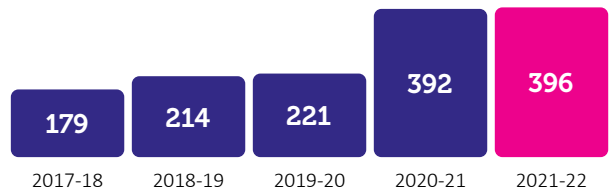
62

medical students received specialist online money advice

403

visitors to Rightsteps, our online wellbeing resource

DocHealth update



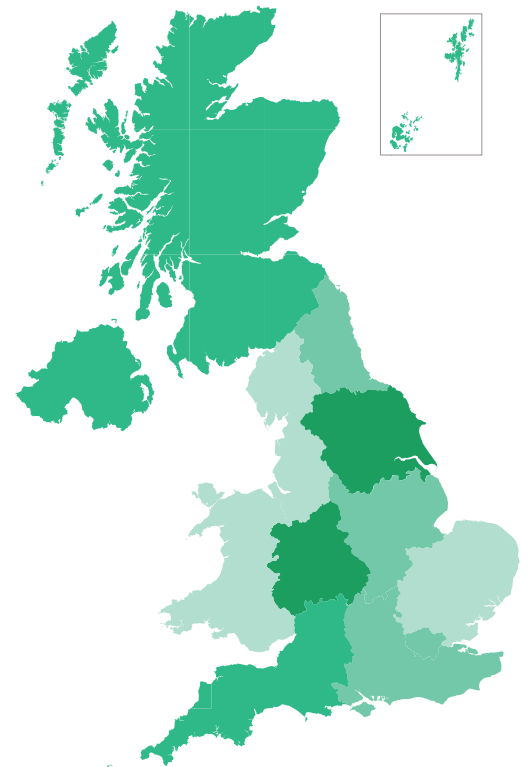
Number of doctors receiving confidential psychotherapeutic support via DocHealth per financial year

Total financial impact

£406,454

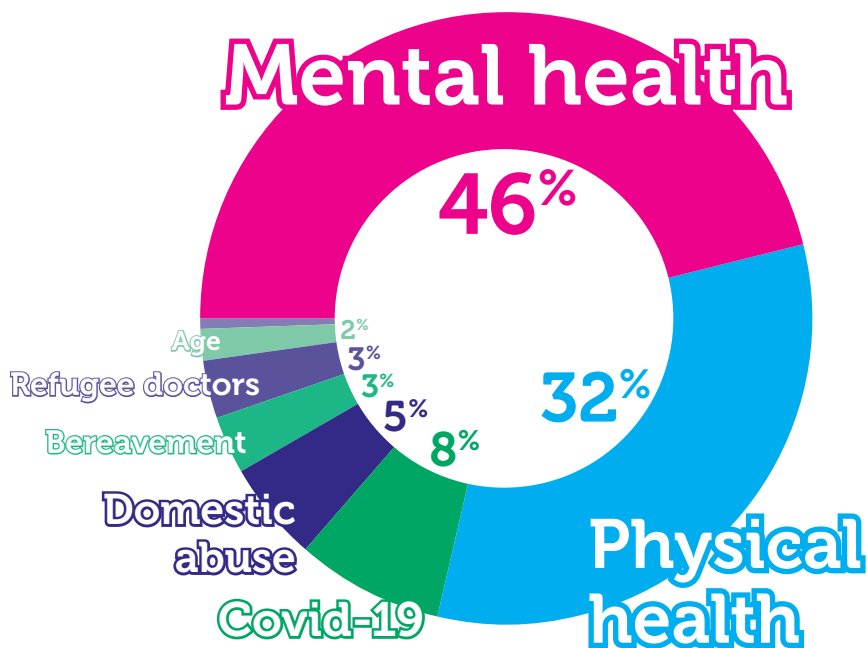
including RMBF grants and state benefits secured by our money advice service

Where are our beneficiaries?



Darker green regions have more RMBF beneficiaries per capita, and lighter green regions have fewer

Why do people turn to us?



Main reason for seeking help, percentage of eligible applicants in 2021-22.

Case study: Dr Hamilton's story

"It made an enormous difference. It gave me hope."

About five years ago, I had been on sick leave due to post-viral neuritis. A return-to-work interview had gone well, and I was really looking forward to resuming my job as a psychiatrist. On the same day as the return-to-work interview I had an accident, which caused concussion and significant soft tissue damage, eventually diagnosed as acute Charcot foot.

It was devastating to have this further setback when I was so close to coming back to work. I needed regular assistive care, with the cost that entails, and the use of a wheelchair.

As I'd had to take an extended period of sick leave recently, this counted against my sick leave entitlement, even though it had been over a year ago. This meant that my sick pay ran out much more quickly.

After using mortgage overpayments I had made over several years, I applied for a mortgage holiday, but I was refused. None of my friends or family were in a situation to help financially.

Being partially sighted, paperwork is difficult for me unless it's provided in large print (which it usually isn't). Trying



to sort out mortgage insurance, talk to my employer about sick pay, all the other things: the admin required to navigate these challenges created a huge additional stress.

I've always been very careful with money. But now I had to drastically cut my outgoings: I relied on cheap tinned food, and wore thermals indoors instead of turning the heating on, even though it was a nasty winter and I needed to keep warm due to my immobility. I lost weight. Despite all this, I was still facing the very real possibility of losing my home.

Things were miserable. One day I searched the internet to see if there was support available for doctors in my position, not expecting much. That's where I found out about the RMBF. I called up and talked to a Caseworker, who was incredibly kind and understanding.

When the news came back that I was eligible for financial support, I was so impressed with how thoroughly they had assessed and understood my situation. The grant provided was enough to cover some mortgage payments and most essential bills.

I'd assumed that I wasn't entitled to any state benefits, but the RMBF Caseworker informed me that actually there were some I could claim, and helped me through the process.

It was such a huge relief, knowing that I would get to keep my house. It made an enormous difference – it gave me hope.

I now donate to the RMBF, because I want others to have the help that I had. I know that there's no obligation to pay back the support I received, but I've decided it's important to me.

Name has been changed

How your support makes a difference

In the words of doctors, medical students and their families

"Thank you so much for this. We can't tell you how relieved we are. This is something that will mean we can focus on recovery and our son."

"This will go a long way to reducing the pressure and toll this horrible past year has put upon me. It is a gesture I will truly never forget, and I hope one day I am in a position to help and support others in the way I have been."

"I am very happy to inform you that I have booked and paid for my exam. This was only possible with your incredible

support. Otherwise paying such a huge fee was simply impossible for me. I will never ever forget RMBF's constant support during my difficult times, enabling me to complete my training with peace of mind."

"I cried with relief receiving this news."

"Your time and effort financially has been a godsend to my family. I never thought I would end up in such a position but once I did, your support was amazing."

"I am deeply grateful for the support and kindness I have been shown."

Medicine, music & mental health

Q&A with Dr Diana Cassell

Dr Diana Cassell is the Clinical Director of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for South West London & St George's Mental Health Trust. She is also an accomplished violist and President of the European Doctors Orchestra (EDO).

We talked to Diana about her time with the EDO, why they are supporting RMBF through their forthcoming London performance, and about music's wellbeing benefits.

Q. What is the European Doctors Orchestra?

An orchestra made up of doctors from across Europe, around half from the UK. We meet two to three times a year in different European locations and put on a concert – last month we played in the Czech Republic.

There is a hectic schedule as we rehearse a full symphonic programme over the course of a weekend, the climax of which is a performance in a concert hall. This October, the venue will be Cadogan Hall in London, with the concert raising funds for the RMBF.

Q. What does it mean to you to be part of the EDO?

It's really exciting being part of a symphony orchestra, and at a much higher standard than any amateur local orchestra I could be part of. The setup also works really well for busy doctors, especially those who work shifts.

I've been part of a local orchestra that meets weekly, rehearsing for a concert at the end of term, and found it a scramble to get to a regular practice session. With the EDO, you can practice the piece at home in your own time, and then take a

few days' leave, carving out the weekend for the rehearsals and performance.

Q: Can you tell us a bit about your EDO colleagues?

As a psychiatrist working in a mental health trust, it's a wonderful chance to meet and play alongside all sorts of other doctors, who I might not meet in my day-to-day work. There are lots of GPs, surgeons, a gastroenterologist, a clinical geneticist: a real mix. Meeting and sharing our experiences of medicine is part of the excitement.

People who come to our performances love the idea that the whole stage is full of doctors. And we are all so passionate about the music, maybe more so than jobbing professional musicians – there is a real energy in our concerts.

Q: We hear a lot about the importance of self-care, wellbeing and resilience for doctors. Can music help with that?

There is lots of evidence of music helping people relax and find peace. It's often associated with helping people whose primary problem is a mental health issue. But it can also help if, say, you have a cardiac condition and you need to reduce your stress levels.

Being in an orchestra has the added benefit that when you're rehearsing, you have to really concentrate on playing your instrument. Whatever you're stressed about – that team you're trying to turn around at work, or that patient you're really worried about – you are forced to forget about it all and focus on the music. It can be quite cathartic, and offer a complete break and release away from the pressures of work.



I hear from a lot of people how important music has been for their wellbeing during the pandemic lockdown. People's lives were quite impoverished in terms of variety and activity. Music was still available and could provide that enrichment.

You also have music therapy which is a more specialist thing. It's principally used for patients who might really struggle to communicate their issue verbally.

Q. We are delighted that the EDO have chosen to support the RMBF. Why is the charity important to you?

The fact is we all know doctors who are having problems or have encountered hard times. I know when I was a junior doctor, I had to pay for childcare for two children and I barely profited from going to work. I had a husband who was earning and I knew by continuing to work I would build my career for the future. If any other problem had hit us at that time, say if my husband had an accident or illness and had been off work – well, we would have been in trouble.

I know someone who had a horrendous time with cancer and needed her jaw reconstructed. She couldn't work – you can't be a psychiatrist and talk with slurred speech. We all know people who, through whatever circumstance, things have gone seriously wrong in their lives. That is why the RMBF is so important in providing a safety net.

Through this concert we want to raise as much money as possible for doctors, medical students and their families who are facing hardship. I would urge all your supporters to buy a ticket, and come and enjoy the performance!



Wellbeing in focus: burnout

Burnout is a serious and widespread issue among doctors across the NHS and elsewhere. However, it is not inevitable and there are ways of preventing and mitigating it.

Find out how to recognise burnout, steps you can take, and support you can access.

What is burnout?

Doctors may have to deal with difficult situations and take great responsibility – often with little support.

Burnout can occur when our resources are overwhelmed by the emotional and physical demands made on us. The term was originally coined 40 years ago, and has had growing acceptance and recognition as a genuine entity supported by neuroscience. It is now included as a condition in ICD-10.

Why do doctors burn out?

Although burnout is usually the result of a sustained period of exposure to stressors, the time frame can be variable. Factors known to affect doctors include workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. A sense of autonomy in the job seems to be protective.

The hallmarks of burnout are:

- **Emotional exhaustion** – characterised by a feeling of emptiness and emotional blunting.
- **Depersonalisation** – manifested by a cynical attitude and negativity.

Predictors of burnout

in healthcare workers include:

- Being younger
- Being female
- Redeployment to a new work area
- Working with Covid patients
- Concerns over PPE
- Prior history of depression



- **Reduced personal accomplishment** – doubts about personal and professional effectiveness.

Early recognition and remediation is key. As is being prepared to seek help – it is a legitimate condition.

73% of GPs

were classed as having severe exhaustion in a 2017 survey

Helping ourselves

There may be organisational factors within the NHS which are hard to address and can impact personal resilience. There are however, some personal protective steps you can take that are within your control:

- **Self-awareness** – being aware and reflective is helpful in work and outside it. Having a realistic view of what is achievable and an awareness of your strengths and weaknesses can reduce frustration. Doctors are notoriously bad at demonstrating self-compassion!
- **Time management and goal setting** – in particular, managing your time to make space for time off and recharging. A healthy work/life balance may need planning and effort to make it happen. Clarifying your values by knowing what life you want to lead can help your resolve.
- **Practice self-care** – eating a healthy diet and taking regular exercise is important for positive mental health. Watch out for negative self-talk: instead, regularly call loved ones to check in, or try to focus on reasons to be grateful.

Getting support for stress and burnout

Sometimes prevention, self-care and support from our colleagues, GP, friends and family aren't enough and we need to ask for extra help. It is not a sign of weakness but of maturity and self-awareness.

The RMBF can offer:

- **Confidential psychotherapeutic support** for doctors via DocHealth, on a self-referral basis
- **Financial support** for doctors and medical students who are facing financial hardship due to burnout or other mental health difficulties
- **Advice articles** covering related conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder and moral injury
- **Online wellbeing support** via our Rightsteps resource
- **Signposting** to other organisations who may be able to help in your specific circumstances

Scan the QR code or visit rmbf.org/get-help for links to all these resources.



92% of NHS trusts

said they had concerns about staff wellbeing, stress and burnout following the pandemic

Sources Left: Predictors of UK healthcare worker burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic, QJM, 2021. Middle: Association of GP wellbeing and burnout with patient safety in UK primary care, BJGP, 2019. Right: Workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care, House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2021

Why we donate: Acacia Retreat

One of the most effective ways to combat stress and burnout is to take breaks and switch off – both throughout the day, and for longer periods of recovery. For doctors, of course, this can be easier said than done. But it is precisely because doctors are so busy that time to decompress is so important.

Acacia Retreat was created by Hampshire-based GPs Dr Sandy Miles and Dr Sam Powell (*below*), and aims to offer space to stop, breathe and relax for doctors who feel overwhelmed by the demands of medical life. Both say they benefited from this kind of getaway during challenging times in their own medical careers, inspiring them to work together to create the retreat.

Hosted at a peaceful riverside cottage, the three-day retreat involves art,

music and literature, gentle exercise and nutritious meals. Sandy and Sam offer one-to-one coaching sessions, and advice on using neuro-linguistic programming and other psychological support techniques. Most importantly, there is plenty of time for rest and reflection. The retreats have also now been accredited for CPD.

“Sam and I have both been affected by stress and burnout during our medical careers, and we were both greatly helped by going on a retreat. We wanted to support our colleagues in their search for a well-balanced life,” says Sandy.

Sandy and Sam have kindly made a donation to the RMBF, and also plan to donate profits from future retreats to support doctors in hardship. We’re so grateful for this kind support, which will

make a significant difference to the lives of medical families in serious need.

“We’re really passionate about doctors’ wellbeing, so it’s great to see that the RMBF has developed its wellbeing support, with services like DocHealth, Righsteps and the Advice Hubs,” says Sam. “It’s reassuring to know that not only do our donations provide crucial financial support through crisis, but they also help doctors to look after their wellbeing and hopefully avoid reaching that crisis point in the first place.”

acaciaretreat.org

If you are involved in running a company, course, or programme that aims to improve doctors’ wellbeing, including a fundraising ask for the RMBF is a great way to increase your impact. We can provide top fundraising tips, as well as information resources and promotional materials for your customers or attendees. Our team would love to hear from you – please email info@rmbf.org.



European Doctors Orchestra concert for RMBF: tickets now available!

After the closure of concert venues for large stretches of the pandemic, hearing live music again in 2022 can be especially moving. Even more so if you know that by attending, you’re helping to support those doctors and medical students who have faced a particularly hard time over the past two years.

We’re so excited to welcome RMBF supporters to a magical afternoon of classical music, played by doctors from across Europe, all to raise funds supporting their colleagues in hardship.

Where and when

Sunday 9 October 2022, 3pm
Cadogan Hall, 5 Sloane Terrace,
London SW1X 9DQ

Music programme

Walton: Orb and Sceptre overture
Shostakovich: Violin Concerto No. 1
Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique

Players

European Doctors Orchestra conducted by Grant Llewellyn with violin solo from Hyeyoon Park

Tickets and information

Visit rmbf.org/edo or scan the QR code:



Xmas cards on sale

If you’re an early bird who likes to get a head start on the festive season, we’ve got you covered!

Our charity Christmas card shop is now ready to take your order. Three colourful new card designs, plus wrapping paper and gift ideas, are available.



Visit charitycardshop.com/rmbf or scan the QR code:

