

#LookingAfterYouToo
Coaching support for all
primary care staff

NHS



Case study



Role and context

Claire is a practice manager for a large practice, spread over two sites covering 16,500 patients in the Northamptonshire region. The practice has eleven GPs (54 permanent members of staff in total) and is also a dispensing practice. Claire has been in the role for nearly two years and had just overseen a practice restructure when the COVID-19 pandemic started which “shook things up a bit.” Twelve staff members (including Claire) were in the high-risk category and had to work from home, which meant that she found herself trying to run the practice from a completely different location from the rest of the team.

Challenge of COVID-19 on own wellbeing

At the start of the pandemic, Claire reported a high level of anxiety both in relation to contracting COVID-19, but also ensuring that “the huge amount of daily guidance is updated every day”, and found that the practice staff were responding to the stresses differently. To help this, the practice set up a range of systems to enable communication and internal relationships to help those working from home. This included video-linked morning catchups so teams could see everyone face-to-face and restructuring of some roles to adapt them to homeworking. Claire was concerned about what this would mean for her position as a practice manager and felt that she was losing a sense of perspective of her role and her ability to fulfil her tasks effectively. She also knew other staff were also feeling anxious, but she felt unable to do anything about it. She says:

“I am practiced at living with uncertainty, but [COVID-19] ratcheted that up to the next level.”

“I was just feeling so overwhelmed and incredibly anxious.”

How #LookingAfterYouToo coaching helped

Claire has previously used coaching in a different role so knew how valuable it can be, and although she has a range of coping strategies (yoga, meditation, journaling prompts), the #LookingAfterYouToo virtual coaching was appealing as “I was just feeling so overwhelmed and incredibly anxious.” Claire also felt that she was losing a sense of perspective of her role and her ability to fulfil her tasks effectively. She also knew other staff were also feeling anxious but she felt unable to do anything about it.

One particular aspect of the coaching that Claire really appreciated was the way in which her coach was able to ask powerful and challenging questions which allowed her to think about

situations differently, but also reassured her that her worries were being acknowledged: "I was reassured when the coach told me that everything I was feeling was completely normal."

The coaching helped Claire think of 'practical quick wins' that could help her realise what she has been able to achieve in her day/week. These techniques have included actions such as phoning colleagues every day to remind them that she is available to help if needed; enjoying the opportunities for some quiet time to think strategically about the future of the practice post the pandemic and where the learning opportunities have been and practicing self-compassion to recognise that she cannot look after practice staff if she is burnt-out herself. Claire referred to 'real nuggets' that she would take away from the sessions that she had. For example, from her very first session the coach challenged her by saying: "you are telling me all the things you can't do, but you need to ask yourself what you can do?"

Personal impact

"[The coaching] flipped my mindset from what I can't do to what I can."

"I found myself emulating the way my coach had spoken to me."

Since returning to the practice Claire has since been approaching stressful situations with a different perspective, asking team members: "what can we do to address this situation?", which automatically leads people to thinking towards positive outcomes and developing their own processes to reach the end goal.

Organisational impact

Claire feels that the virtual coaching has not only benefited her wellbeing, but the team and practice have also benefited because the techniques have helped the practice think both more positively and strategically if future challenges occur. She said "Although the first few weeks were really difficult, the whole experience has been really transformational ... because of this I feel really supported. It has been brilliant. I am so grateful."

#LookingAfterYouToo is free coaching support available to all primary care staff.

Book your session at a time that suits you.
Sessions are available 7 days a week, either by video or telephone.

people.nhs.uk/lookingafteryoutoo