

My name is Matthew Walton. I'm a junior doctor and amateur film maker.

So, at this conference I've come to talk about resilience, in the context of bereavement training and facing death that we all do in our careers. And, for me, I had my first experiences observing with an air ambulance service, where I went to some horrible cases, like hanging or, sort of, kids getting attacked and it was obviously quite traumatic, for me. But I hadn't had any education on that ever before and so I was really lucky in that I was observing with a senior doctor called Mike Christian and he was an air ambulance doctor, a military doctor, someone who I hugely respect. And he for the first time, sat me down and told me that, you know, what I could experience afterwards, might be flashbacks, or negative thoughts, sadness; and all of that was actually normal. He experienced it too and it wasn't something to be worried about or ashamed of and it was ok to talk about it. So, in essence that's what I wanted to try and share with other people and convey that message to them. So, I had a go at making a short film about my experience in that particular case with him. And it's a real-life example of an emergency air ambulance team who go to a traumatic event and then how they cope afterwards, together as a team and how they follow each other up, check up on each other and do some really basic things that helped a lot and some of the lessons from that. And that kind of self-disclosure and mentorship offered from, Mike, the senior doctor to me hopefully comes across in the film, and that empowers us as juniors to feel ok, you know, if a senior doctor experiences this then we can also experience this, we can talk about this too. And, so that was the idea behind making the film, to share that education and I think it's especially relevant in the context of bereavement training because, ultimately if we're going to look after patients and we're going to care for families of people who've lost loved ones, ultimately we are going to be close to death and we need to be prepared for how we can deal with it.

And since then, since making that video we've managed to include it in bereavement training programmes which are now being launched for all of the air ambulances in the country and also it's been picked up by Lifelines, the Scottish mental health charity, by Stephen Fry, President of Mind, and broadcast on BBC Look North, as part of an Inside Out documentary and BBC Breakfast, which has reached about 6 million people which has been fantastic for raising that awareness for the issues.

I think it's not something that we're really educated on as an occupational hazard, so with paramedics, the suicide rate is actually double that of the general population if you look on the Office of National Statistics, and it's really something that we should address more as a public. I think we understand well the military and how they experience trauma / PTSD but actually our understanding's probably quite behind on how our emergency responders experience the exact same things based on the stuff that they do in their work. But as a public I think we're not quite as aware as we could be on that. And, my overall messages, which I'm trying to deliver in my presentation are just that firstly, it's ok to experience, kind of, negative feelings and distress after the traumatic events that we see, it's common, it happens to everyone, and we should talk about it, and it is ok to talk about it.

There's some simple things that we can all do, like following up with colleagues, we can text our friends and colleagues and check up on how they're doing. We can run debriefs in our work environments, so that we can all, just in a busy setting have a little bit of time to acknowledge how AS serious the event is, to recognise who was actually there and make sure that we can all follow up on each other afterwards. And I think just meaningfully asking people how they're doing if you suspect something, something's wrong and giving them the opportunity to talk about their own experiences is really important. And all in all, us being resilient and us being able to deal with seeing death and being right up close with that life or death situation, means that we will be able to be more comfortable in ourselves and then therefore be able to provide better bereavement care to our patients and our patients' relatives.

So, for me when I've experienced this sort of thing, where I've experienced a traumatic event and I've had some psychological fallout from that, for me it's been flashbacks, going straight back in to that event, and seeing the family and the home, remembering that tragedy and feeling physically upset because of it. I think what's really helped me is knowing that it's normal, and that all of us will experience this and it's not anything to be ashamed of and that we can, and should, talk about it. I think talking with other people and with senior colleagues, and friends and family, they understand, and they really help and so that's been one thing that's been really helpful for me.

So, I think the key message is that for us to provide really good bereavement care to our patients and their families we need to be comfortable ourselves with being right on the front line of experiencing death, and that's not an easy thing to get used to and it does take time. We need to have more training in our medical schools, paramedic schools, fire, police about resilience and how we can cope with experiencing trauma in our line of work.

We need to raise our own awareness for the possible reactions that we might have as individuals experiencing potentially traumatic events. And we need to really make a culture change where we all feel comfortable in disclosing those thoughts, feelings, fears, anxieties, vulnerabilities to our senior colleagues and our peers, so that we can all talk about these things more openly and therefore seek the help we that need, if we need it.

The film was produced in March 2020 and can be found at www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or <https://vimeo.com/392427508>

For more information visit www.sad.scot.nhs.uk or contact supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk

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