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Burnout in paediatric oncology staff and its relationship with traumatic stress, psychological flexibility and coping styles

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Burnout has become recognised as an infamous enigma of modern day working (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Originally conceptualised to describe the experience those in the helping or healthcare professions, burnout is been defined as an understandable psychological response to stressors in the work place. Maslach and colleagues (1981) characterise burnout by three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion; depersonalisation; and low personal accomplishment. While many aspects of caring for patients with cancer can be rewarding (Shanafelt & Dyrbye, 2012), oncology care professionals experience patients going through considerable suffering and often death and therefore may be particularly at risk of burnout. Nurses, Healthcare Assistants, Doctors, and Consultants working in paediatric oncology teams in hospitals across England and Wales and members of national paediatric oncology professional groups were invited to complete an online questionnaire. The prevalence of burnout, the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) constructs of psychological flexibility and experiential avoidance, and personal and organisational styles were assessed. It was hypothesised that psychological flexibility and experiential avoidance may be key mediators for burnout and that this may help in understanding the strategies implemented by paediatric oncology staff. The findings suggest that there is high prevalence of burnout amongst paediatric oncology staff. Statistical analysis demonstrated that higher levels of burnout correlated with staff who showed less psychological flexibility. This suggests that an ACT framework could prove to be an effective intervention to reduce burnout in paediatric oncology staff.

Biography

Matthew Yates is in his final year of Clinical Psychologist Doctoral training at Cardiff University, Wales. The research presented is the result of a thesis submitted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology. His clinical interests include health psychology, healthcare staff wellbeing, and child/ paediatric services..

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