WELLBEING & WORKPLACE DIGNITY | MODULE 10

Health support, occupational health and crisis help

Understand what different health and wellbeing services provide, their confidentiality limits and when urgent help is required.

✓ 17 min reading

✓ Full teaching, practical next steps and reflection

✓ Six practice questions with answers and explanations

✓ Complete source list and jurisdiction notes

Prepared for SAS, locally employed and other UK doctors

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Using this module

Independent education	This is general professional information, not individual clinical, legal, employment, immigration, regulatory, tax or pensions advice. Current official instructions and the circumstances of the individual case remain controlling. Practice scores do not establish professional competence or accreditation.

The short answer

Use emergency services for immediate danger, a GP or urgent local service for clinical assessment, occupational health for work-function advice, and eligible specialist or peer services for confidential support. Ask every service about eligibility, records and confidentiality before assuming what it can provide.

Three next actions

- Save the urgent and confidential support contacts relevant to your nation.
- Arrange clinical assessment if symptoms persist or impair safety.
- Ask occupational health to address work function and adjustments rather than expecting it to replace treatment.

Learning objectives

- Match urgency and need to the correct service.
- Understand occupational-health boundaries.
- Use four-nation doctors' support routes safely.

Urgent help now

If you or another person is in immediate danger, call 999 or attend the nearest Emergency Department. For urgent mental-health help that is not an immediate life-threatening emergency, use the current NHS urgent route for your nation, your GP or local crisis service. Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 for confidential emotional support across the UK, but it is not a substitute for emergency clinical care.

Do not leave a person alone where there is credible immediate risk. Remove access to immediate means where it is safe to do so, arrange clinical help and share the minimum necessary information. A website tool cannot assess individual suicide risk.

GP and treatment services

Doctors need their own GP and should avoid informal self-treatment or corridor consultations for significant illness. A GP can assess physical and mental health, prescribe or refer, issue fit notes and coordinate care. Emergency, urgent, community and secondary-care routes remain available according to clinical need.

Seeking treatment does not automatically imply impaired fitness to practise. Professional responsibility includes obtaining appropriate care and considering whether health affects safe work. Discuss any necessary work restrictions with treating clinicians and occupational health.

Occupational health

Occupational health advises on the relationship between health and work: functional effects, safety, adjustments, rehabilitation and return. It is usually not the main treating service and does not make the employer's final management decision. Ask what the referral question is, what report will be produced and whether you can see it under the applicable arrangements.

A useful referral addresses specific functions and barriers. Provide relevant clinical information, but do not assume the manager needs a full diagnosis or history. Clarify consent and the limits that apply if serious safety concerns emerge.

Doctor-specific confidential support

The BMA currently offers a 24-hour counselling and peer-support line for all doctors and medical students, not only members, while structured therapy has separate eligibility. It is not an emergency or employment-advice line. NHS Practitioner Health supports eligible health and care staff in England who cannot access confidential care locally. Canopi currently offers confidential mental-health support to eligible NHS and social-care staff in Wales and is separate from the employer.

Scotland's National Wellbeing Hub signposts the Workforce Specialist Service; Northern Ireland's Regional Workforce Wellbeing Network and individual HSC employers provide local support. Eligibility and funding can change, so use the dated support finder and open the provider's current page before relying on a service.

What wellbeing support does not do

Counselling and peer support provide emotional help, reflection and coping strategies. They do not normally investigate bullying, interpret a contract, represent a doctor, provide legal advice or decide whether a regulator must be notified. Canopi explicitly states that it does not provide legal advice, complaints handling, mediation or advocacy.

Use parallel routes where needed. A doctor may require therapy, union representation, a safety report and practical family support at the same time. Tell each service enough about the wider picture to avoid conflicting advice, while controlling unnecessary disclosure.

Questions to ask about confidentiality

Ask: what personal information is collected; where it is stored; who can access it; whether it appears in an NHS clinical record or employment file; how long it is retained; what is shared with funders; and which risks or legal duties limit confidentiality. Independent does not necessarily mean anonymous, and confidential does not mean no information is recorded.

The BMA describes rare circumstances in which serious risk may require its peer-support service to take further steps. Canopi explains that it does not contribute to the person's NHS medical record. These are different models. Read the current privacy information rather than relying on assumptions.

Worked example: parallel support

A doctor develops panic and insomnia while a grievance is underway. Their GP assesses and treats the health problem. Occupational health advises on temporary duties and review. A counselling service provides emotional support. The union advises on the grievance and meeting. The SAS Advocate helps the doctor understand local contacts and notices a wider theme affecting other SAS doctors without taking over the case.

The doctor gives each service information relevant to its role and asks about records and sharing. This coordinated approach prevents a counsellor being expected to interpret the contract or HR being used as a clinical service.

Prepare for a support call

Write your current location, whether you are safe, the main difficulty, what help you need today, current clinical support, medication or substance concerns where relevant, upcoming work, people available to you and any communication or accessibility needs.

If the service cannot meet the need, ask where it recommends you go next and what to do if risk worsens. Eligibility and opening hours should be checked on the provider's current page.

Common mistake

Avoid this	Calling a confidential counselling service and assuming it also provides employment representation can delay the advice needed for a workplace process.

Pause and reflect

Which three contacts would you use for immediate danger, clinical treatment and employment support respectively?

Takeaways

- Urgency determines the first route.
- Occupational health focuses on health in relation to work.
- Check eligibility, records and confidentiality for every service.

Knowledge check

Choose one best answer. These practice questions support reflection; they do not assess a real case or confer accreditation. Answer positions match the browser edition.

1. What should be used for immediate danger to life?

A. A routine appraisal

B. Emergency services

C. A future coaching session

D. A workplace survey

2. What is a GP's role?

A. Determining a grievance

B. Clinical assessment and treatment coordination

C. Union representation

D. Employment investigation

3. What is occupational health primarily for?

A. Replacing all specialist treatment

B. Health, function, adjustments and return to work

C. Deciding legal liability

D. Criminal investigation

4. Which statement about BMA wellbeing support is correct?

A. It includes counselling and peer support but is not an emergency service

B. It is only for consultants

C. It is the BMA employment-advice line

D. It makes GMC decisions

5. Can counselling determine whether bullying occurred under policy?

A. Only in Wales

B. Yes

C. Only if six sessions are completed

D. No; it provides wellbeing support, not formal findings

6. What should you ask a confidential service?

A. Whether it keeps records and the limits of confidentiality

B. Whether it can conceal immediate danger

C. Whether it can act as every adviser

D. Whether it can guarantee a particular outcome

Answers and explanations

1. B — Emergency services

Immediate danger requires emergency help.

Review urgent routes.

2. B — Clinical assessment and treatment coordination

A GP provides clinical care rather than employment process advice.

Review treatment routes.

3. B — Health, function, adjustments and return to work

Occupational health advises on the interface between work and health.

Review occupational-health boundaries.

4. A — It includes counselling and peer support but is not an emergency service

The wellbeing line is distinct from employment advice and emergency care.

Review doctor-specific services.

5. D — No; it provides wellbeing support, not formal findings

Treatment and investigation are different functions.

Review parallel support routes.

6. A — Whether it keeps records and the limits of confidentiality

Realistic confidentiality expectations require clear information about records and exceptions.

Review the confidentiality checklist.

Official and professional sources

Confirm the current source version and applicable nation, contract, scheme or specialty. A source list is not a statement that every rule applies to every reader.

BMA counselling and peer support
UK · https://www.bma.org.uk/doctorshealthmatters

NHS Practitioner Health eligibility
England · https://www.practitionerhealth.nhs.uk/healthcare-staff-in-england

Canopi: confidential support for NHS and social-care staff
Wales · https://canopi.nhs.wales/frequently-asked-questions/

National Wellbeing Hub: Workforce Specialist Service
Scotland · https://wellbeinghub.scot/the-workforce-specialist-service-wss/

HSC Northern Ireland Regional Workforce Wellbeing Network
Northern Ireland · https://www.workforcewellbeing.hscni.net/

Edition and verification

Editorial edition: 9 September 2026. The page source-review date is 2026-09-07. A publication date, editorial edit and substantive source check have different meanings. See sasdoctors.com/corrections for material corrections and the scope of review.

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