

Everything Wellbeing: “It’s OK Not to Be OK”

 **Estimated reading time: 5 minutes**

Dear Resident Doctors,

Welcome to the first post of Everything Wellbeing, a wellbeing blog that discusses wellbeing amongst resident doctors.

We live in a digital world. We scroll through reels, binge-watch videos, and listen to podcasts, but rarely *read*.

Our attention spans are shrinking (mine is 🧐), and I find it incredibly hard to sit down with a book these days.

Stories are important. The more we tell each other our stories, the better we understand each other.

So today I thought I’d share my story, and I’m going to use one of the most conservative forms of storytelling, not a reel, not a podcast, not a YouTube video.

I am going to, believe it or not, “WRITE,” in the hope that you can spare a few minutes of your busy day to “READ” 😊.

A Little About Me

I’m Junaid.

An Emergency Medicine trainee in the East of England.

I’m originally from India, grew up in Abu Dhabi until I was 18, returned to India for medical school, and moved to the UK in 2019.

My story starts in the early months of 2022. On paper, things looked great.

✅ I had secured a training number in EM, something I’d worked hard for over two years.

💍 I was getting married to a wonderful partner that summer.

🚗 I had just bought my first car

Life was supposed to be great... but it wasn’t.

When Life Feels Like It’s Cracking

Despite everything going right *on paper*, inside, I felt the opposite.

I woke up each day with a strange, tight pang of anxiety.

Small, insignificant things affected me deeply.

I couldn’t find joy in anything; everything felt *pointless*.

I felt emotionally *numb*, like I couldn’t feel anything at all.

And I was absolutely *exhausted*, mentally and physically.

But what scared me the most was the *anger*.

I wasn't shouting at people or lashing out, but I constantly felt this low-level rage, like I wanted to scream at the world. I'd be driving to work and suddenly realise I was clenching my jaw, grinding my teeth, for no clear reason. I wasn't even sure *what* I was angry about.

A lot of that anger started seeping into my relationship with my parents. We've always had our disagreements, like most families, but things began feeling strained. And then came the guilt—guilt for feeling this way *when everything was "fine."*

I didn't understand what was happening to me.

I just knew I wasn't OK.

I Tried *Everything*

I tried to fix it myself.

- Mindfulness apps
- Meditations
- Journaling
- Listening to podcasts on happiness

But nothing helped. In fact, the harder I tried, the *more* frustrated I became.

A few years earlier, I had seen a therapist during a difficult time, and it had helped. So I thought maybe it's time to try again. This time, it was fear that drove me. I was worried that if I continued like this, I'd ruin relationships with the people I loved and slowly turn into someone I didn't recognise.

The Diagnosis I Didn't Expect

I found a therapist online. I was lucky she was kind, understanding, and above all, a great listener.

After our first session, she said something that caught me completely off guard:

"Junaid, I think you might be suffering from depression."

I was stunned. That wasn't what I expected. I was working every day, smiling, getting through shifts. I thought depression meant crying all day in bed, hiding from the world.

She asked me to complete a questionnaire.

Result: **Moderately severe depression.**

As strange as it sounds, I felt *relieved*. At least now I had a name for what I was feeling. It *made sense*. And surprisingly, yes, anger can be a symptom of depression, especially in men.

The Vicious Cycle

My therapist and I spoke at length about my life and the pressures I was under:

- Moving countries
- Starting training
- Surviving the pandemic as a frontline doctor
- Wedding planning
- Moving house
- ARCP approaching

She told me I was burnt out, and I was being *too hard on myself*.

We started working on strategies for anxiety and mood. I began reading about depression, treatments, and personal accounts of recovery. I started seeing some progress...

But then, things crashed again.

The Breaking Point

One morning, I just couldn't keep going.

I was on an ICU rotation and was trying to have a difficult conversation with a patient's family. I just couldn't hold it together. I stepped away and found my clinical supervisor.

I told him, "*I can't do this anymore.*"

He listened compassionately and told me to go home. He encouraged me to speak to my GP and take some time off.

I also spoke to my therapist again. She said, "*You've been trying so hard. Maybe it's time to try medication.*"

Taking the Leap

I didn't know how I felt about antidepressants.

Where I come from, mental illness is stigmatised and that conditioning sticks. But I was desperate. I had tried *everything* else.

I spoke to my partner and my parents. They were supportive. If this could help me feel like myself again, why not try?

My GP prescribed me Sertraline.

The first two weeks were awful. My tummy hated it. My anxiety spiked. But I stuck with it, and slowly, something shifted.

Feeling the Fog Lift

The medication didn't erase the stress, but it gave me the space to *cope* with it better. I could think clearly again. I didn't feel constantly overwhelmed. I could breathe.

I also began:

- Prioritising sleep
- Eating better
- Engaging with PSW
- Taking small steps to care for myself

One of the suggestions that really helped was going LTFT (less than full-time). At first, I felt *guilty*. Like I was giving up. Like I was failing.

But then my therapist asked:

“Would you run a marathon with a broken leg?”

“No.”

“Exactly. You'd rest, recover, and do physio. The same goes for your mind.”

It made perfect sense. I spent six months thinking it over, and eventually dropped to 80%.

It made a huge difference.

The Road to Recovery

A year later, I started feeling like myself again.

- ✓ I had weaned off Sertraline
- ✓ I passed my Membership exams
- ✓ I became an ED Registrar

I still have difficult days, and the job is still incredibly hard. But now I have tools: awareness, self-compassion, and support.

Why I Took This Fellowship

I took this fellowship to give back, to support doctors the way I was supported when I needed it most.

One of the hardest parts of depression was the *isolation*. I felt like I was failing while everyone else was managing.

So here's what I want to say to you:

Doctors are human too

And **it is OK not to be OK.**

Mental illness doesn't always show.

Even when I was depressed, my colleagues didn't notice. I once told my registrar I was considering going part-time, and he said:

"Why? You're doing really well!"

That's how invisible it can be.

So, please, check in with each other. Be kind. Ask questions. Support one another.

And if you're struggling, please seek help. There is no shame in it. In fact, it may be the *bravest* thing you do.

I'll be writing more regularly with small, practical tips on wellbeing. Things that have helped me, and might help you too.

Until then, be kind to yourselves.

And remember to take great care of yourselves so that you can take great care of others

Warmest Regards

Junaid

(Your Friendly Neighbourhood Wellbeing Fellow)