

The Impact Of Suicide Awareness Training For Staff Exposed To High Covid-19 Workloads

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Introduction

Low morale, burnout and exhaustion are longstanding issues within the NHS, undoubtedly worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. 33% of trainees report burnout to a high/very high degree [1].

Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in intensive care unit (ICU) staff are currently up to nine times higher than that of the general population, and twice that of veterans recently returning from theatres of conflict [2].

One in seven ICU doctors and one in five ICU nurses reported thoughts of self-harm or suicide following the first wave of Covid-19 in June 2020 [2].

Following the suicides of two members of staff working locally in high acuity areas, 3 half-day SafeTALK suicide awareness courses were delivered in June 2021, aiming to improve early recognition and peer support of mental ill health and suicide.

Methods

Courses were attended by staff from ICU, theatres and the acute respiratory care unit (ARCU) from three hospitals sites. Pre and post course surveys were completed by attendees who rated their agreement with questions on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = strongly disagree, 10 = strongly agree).

Results

97% of attendees knew colleagues who have experienced low mood or anxiety over the last year. **37%** knew colleagues who had experienced thoughts or behaviours of self-harm/suicide (n=30).

The ability to identify those at risk of self-harm/suicide improved from a mean value of **5.7** to **8.6** (p<0.05)

The ability to support those at risk of self-harm/suicide rose from a mean value of **6.3** to **8.9** (p<0.05)

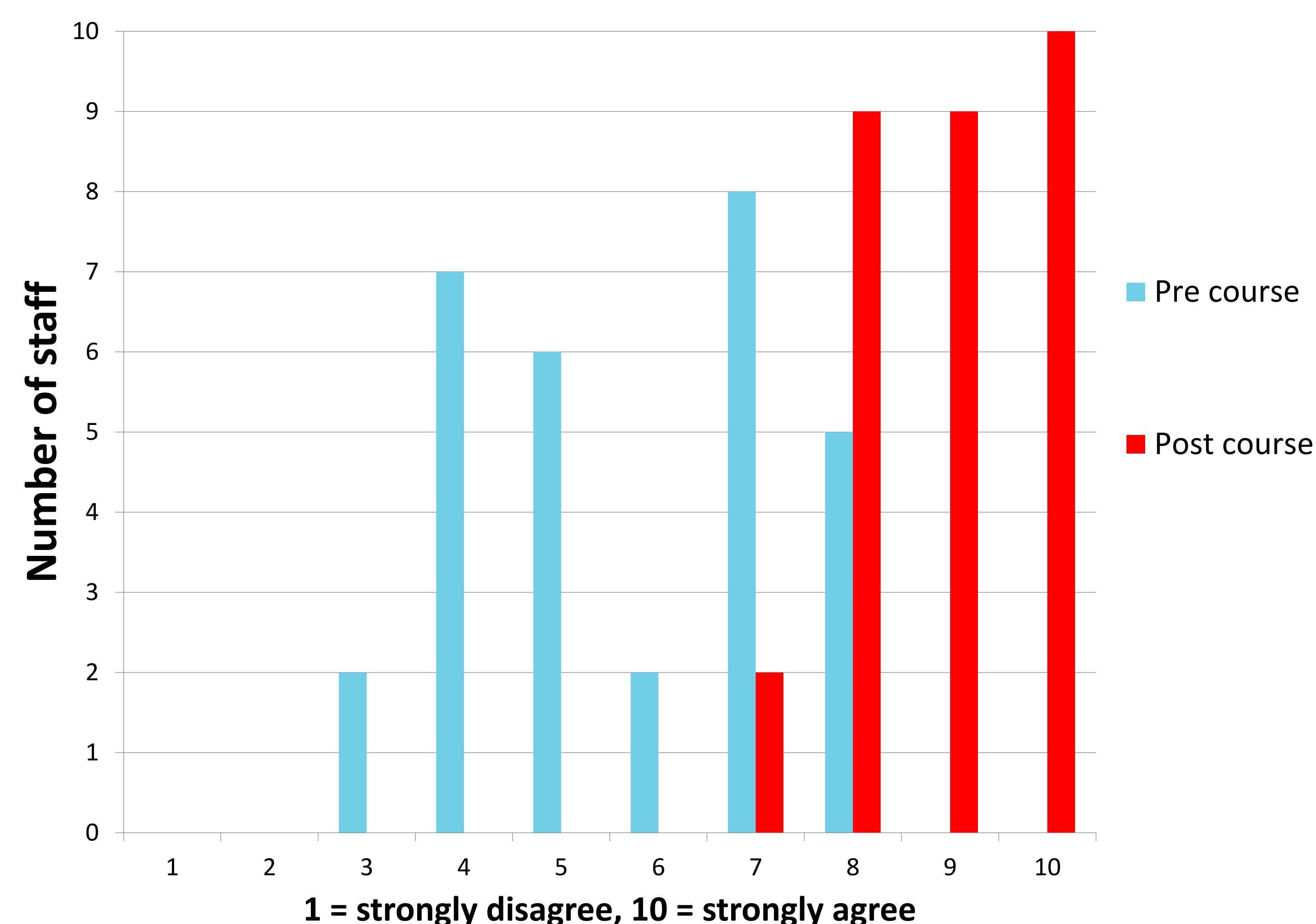
Free text comments highlighted the importance of the topics covered, the need for more education around mental health for all staff and how the courses benefitted attendees in personal and professional capacities.

“Very informative session, needed now more than ever. I have gained more awareness around identifying and addressing mental health. I think this session would benefit all departments in the hospital”

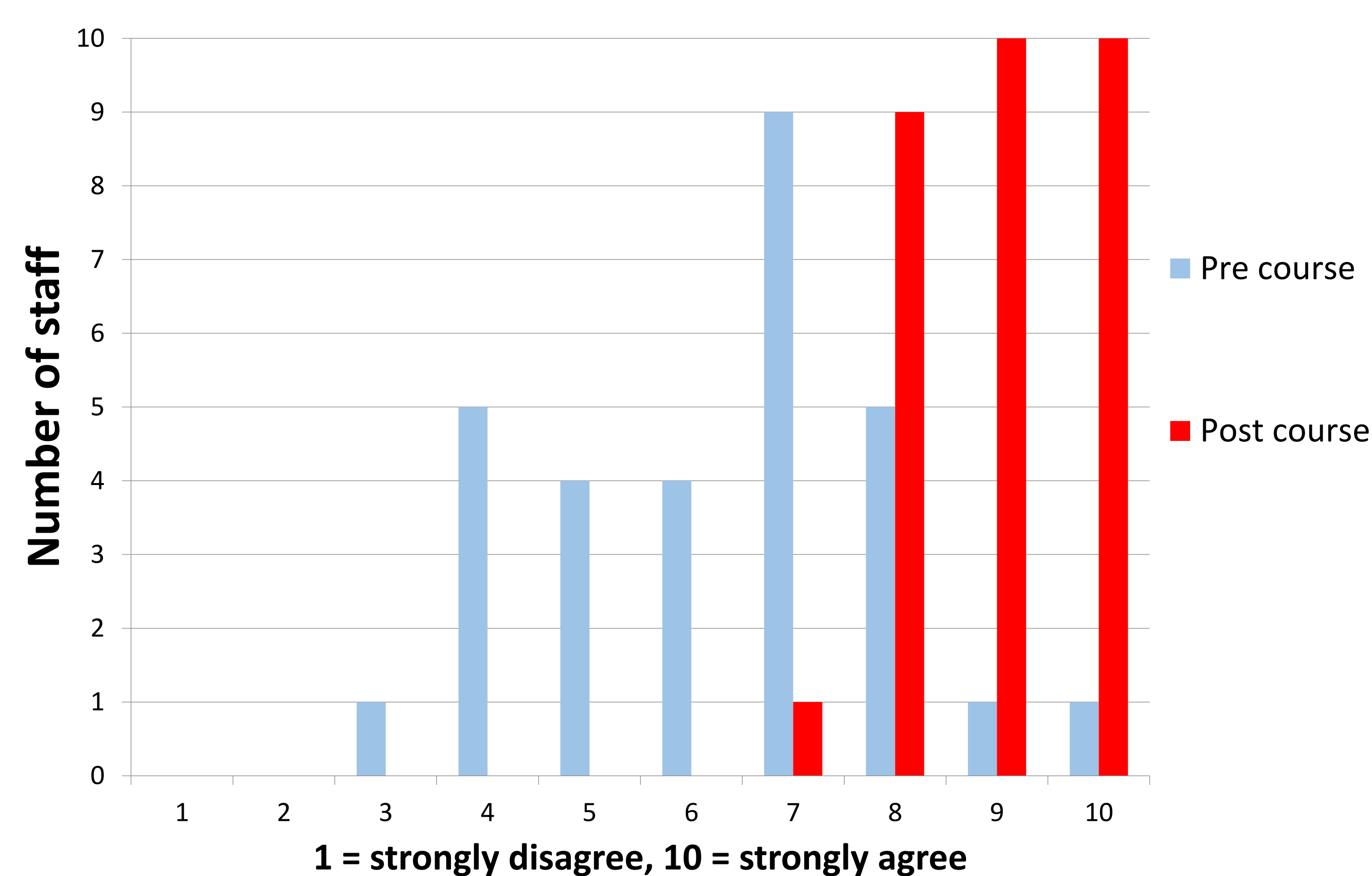
“This is an extremely important subject that more people need to be trained in. Good to have a range of specialties/wards/HCPs as this can affect anyone at any level”

“It has given me tools that could help friends, family and colleagues”

‘I feel comfortable identifying those at risk of self-harm/suicidal thoughts’



‘I feel able to support colleagues at risk of self-harm/suicidal behaviour’



Discussion

The damaging effects of burnout are well documented and rates of burnout amongst clinicians are rising.

High levels of PTSD and thoughts of self harm/suicide have been reported in staff exposed to significant psychological stressors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Educational events around suicide awareness led to significant increases in the ability of staff to identify warning signs and support colleagues at risk of self-harm/suicide.

References

[1] General Medical Council (2021). *National Training Survey 2021*. Available: https://www.gmc-uk.org/-/media/documents/national-training-survey-results-2021---summary-report_pdf-87050829.pdf. Last accessed 26th Feb 2022

[2] Greenberg N, Weston D, Hall C, Caulfield T, Williamson V, Fong K. Mental health of staff working in intensive care during Covid-19. *Occup Med (Lond)*. 2021;71(2):62-67.