Health and wellbeing part 2: how to manage stress

In this article...
- The theory of personality type
- Using this theory to identify coping strategies during times of stress and pressure
- Methods of coping

Understanding your personality type can help you to deal with stress

Author Sue Nash is facilitator of individual, team and service development, Action Learning Teams Consultancy, and associate, Royal College of Nursing Consultancy.


The first article in this two-part series discussed research on health and wellbeing in healthcare and signposted resources on coping strategies to prevent stress. This second article discusses strategies to help health professionals look after themselves by being aware of their personality. It also aims to encourage them to look at what they can influence and control so they can be more proactive and effective.

Another way our minds work differently according to the theory of psychological type is in how we make decisions. We either have a preference for thinking (structuring decisions through objective balance, emphasising logic, reason, truth and fairness) or feeling (structuring decisions by focusing on personal values, people and needs). This does not mean those with a thinking preference do not feel and vice versa; we manage to mix both, but are more comfortable using our preferred style. Understanding this will help us realise why relationships with colleagues can be a potential cause of stress.

There is a higher prevalence of “feeling” individuals in nursing (Briggs Myers et al, 1998). It is important for such people to have harmony in the workplace; they tend to feel stressed at work more than those with a preference for thinking, who are more likely to cite their causes of stress as an insufficiently challenging workload or a lack of autonomy (OPP, 2006). We can take measures to develop our non-preferred type (Box 1).
Coping with change
Different personality types see change in different ways; this can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication. Barger and Kirby (2004) found there are those who:
• Experience change as fun and good, and so want to change things;
• May like the idea of change but want to think about it;
• Are in between and change things that are not working, as long as it is practical.

We need to ask ourselves the following questions when dealing with change in order to avoid sitting in our comfort zone:
• Is this change for the sake of change?
• Did I throw the baby out with the bath water?
• Did I throw out the bath water or hold on to that as well as the baby?

References

Box 1: Developing your non-preferred type

Feeling types can benefit from the natural inclination of thinking types to:
• Analyse consequences and implications
• Hold consistently to a policy
• Stand firm for important principles
• Create rational systems
• Be fair

Thinking types can benefit from the natural inclination of feeling types to:
• Forecast how others will react and feel
• Make necessary individual exceptions
• Stand firm for human-centred values
• Organise people and tasks harmoniously
• Appreciate the thinking type along with everyone else