

Charlotte Carruthers
c.carruthers@massey.ac.nz
+64 21 861 226
news.massey.ac.nz

Burnt out but still working: Massey research reveals how senior doctors recover

New research from Te Kūhanga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University is shedding light on how senior doctors recover from burnout while continuing to work, challenging common assumptions about what recovery looks like in high-pressure professions.

Researcher and burnout specialist [Sarah McGuinness](#) will share findings from her Master of Science in Psychology [research](#) during a public webinar featuring former Director-General of Health Professor Sir Ashley Bloomfield and Health New Zealand's Chief Wellbeing Officer Dr Joanna Sinclair.

The study explored how senior doctors recover from burnout while remaining in demanding clinical roles, and offers fresh insights into the relationship between work, recovery and organisational conditions.

For Sarah, the research was never just about adding to the academic literature. It was about translating evidence into practical insights that could help people better understand burnout, support recovery and create healthier, more sustainable workplaces.

"I felt strongly from the beginning that I didn't want this research to disappear onto a digital bookshelf somewhere. Burnout in medicine is a significant issue and I wanted the study to spark wider conversation and change."

Her research was inspired by both her own experience of burnout and years spent working with leaders who struggled to balance increasing demands.

"One of the questions I hear repeatedly is: 'How do I look after myself and my team, deliver major change, manage business as usual and not burn out?' I wanted to explore that question more deeply."

Senior doctors were chosen as the focus of the study because burnout rates remain high in the profession and because relatively little is known about how recovery occurs while people remain in challenging workplaces.

"We're often told that if we're burnt out, we should leave our job. But many doctors don't have that option, and many choose to stay. I wanted to understand what recovery looks like in that context and what we can learn from their experiences," Sarah explains.

The webinar will include a conversation with Sir Ashley, whose experience leading Aotearoa New Zealand's public health response during the COVID-19 pandemic will bring a unique perspective on leadership, pressure and sustaining performance.

Sarah says having Sir Ashley involved will help broaden the discussion beyond healthcare.

"Sir Ashley has led through some of New Zealand's most complex and demanding situations. His insights will add a valuable perspective to a conversation that affects leaders, workplaces and communities across the country."

While the research focuses on senior doctors, Sarah believes the lessons extend well beyond medicine.

"There were definitely some surprises in the findings. There are practical insights for individuals, but also important lessons for organisations. Burnout isn't simply an individual wellbeing issue. The conditions people work in matter too."

The findings have already influenced her own approach to health and performance.

"From a personal perspective, the research has changed how I think about wellbeing and how I approach recovery from life's pressures."

To hear from New Zealand's leading health professionals about burnout and how to navigate it, register to attend the webinar.

Event details

"Looked at the Stars with My Daughter": Senior Doctors, Recovery and Rethinking the Way Forward.

7pm to 8pm, Wednesday 19 August, via Zoom

Featuring: Sarah McGuinness, Professor Sir Ashley Bloomfield and Dr Joanna Sinclair

[Register here.](#)

ENDS