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UK doctors' drink/drug problem

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14 June, 2005

THE ARTICLE

UK doctors' drink/drug problem

BNE: The British medical profession has a drink and drug problem, according to a BBC television documentary aired on June 13. Alcohol and substance abuse is becoming disturbingly common among Britain's medical practitioners. The programme claimed that one in 15 doctors and nurses, about 13,000 in total, has an addiction. The BBC discovered that in the past decade, 750 medical staff have been formally disciplined and reprimanded for being drunk or under the influence of drugs while on duty. Reporters also found the medical profession has issued no clear rules governing how much doctors are allowed to drink before going to work.

Dr. Michael Wilks, chairman of the British Medical Association's ethics committee, confessed to reporters that his profession was in denial. He said it needed to acknowledge the fact it had a problem and address the pertinent issues. He told the BBC: "You've got a profession that doesn't want to face up to the fact that it's got a problem in the ranks....You've got levels of denial that make it virtually impossible for an alcoholic doctor to be helped." Dr. Vivienne Nathanson warned that misuse or dependence on alcohol and drugs would adversely affect patient care. She added: "Doctors work in very stressful environments in a culture where it is difficult to seek help."

WARM-UPS

1. DRINK & DRUGS: Have you ever gone to school or work while under the influence of alcohol or drugs? Have you ever drunk alcohol at school or work? Have you ever encountered someone drunk in his/her job? Talk with your partner(s) about alcohol and drugs in the workplace / school. How would you react if you discovered these people to be drunk?

- Your dentist
- The pilot of your airplane
- The cashier at the bank
- A police officer
- Your English teacher
- The doctor about to operate on you
- The repair person fixing your gas cooker
- The photographer at your wedding

2. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

British doctors / BBC TV / alcoholism / drug addiction / nurses / being in denial / rules / seeking counseling / stress at work / stressful jobs

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

3. DOCTOR: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with doctors. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

4. DRUNK DOCTORS OPINIONS: Talk with your partner(s) about how far you agree with these opinions:

- Doctors are human. It's OK for them to drink too much occasionally.
- Doctors should be required to abstain completely from alcohol.
- Being a doctor is stressful. They need to drink.
- A doctor found to be "over the limit" should be banned from medicine for life.
- Doctors are crazy to become alcoholics. They know the damage alcohol causes.
- Alcoholic doctors are probably only in Britain.
- All medical staff should be breath tested every time they go on duty.
- There are plenty of jobs more stressful than a doctor's.

5. STRESS: Which of these jobs do you think are stressful? What are the stresses involved?

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| - English teacher | - Doctor | - Lawyer |
| - Hairdresser | - F1 racing driver | - Actor |
| - Supermarket cashier | - U.S. President | - Artist |

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. British doctors are unhappy because they cannot drink alcohol. | T / F |
| b. One in 15 British doctors and nurses is addicted to drink or drugs. | T / F |
| c. In ten years, 7,500 UK medical staff have been disciplined. | T / F |
| d. There are strict rules governing doctors' alcohol consumption. | T / F |
| e. A chief medical official said doctors accepted a problem existed. | T / F |
| f. The official said pertinent issues regarding alcohol needed addressing. | T / F |
| g. Another official said patient care could never be affected. | T / F |
| h. The same official said doctors work in a supportive environment. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. drink | admonished |
| b. aired | morality |
| c. substance | screened |
| d. reprimanded | recognize |
| e. governing | alcohol |
| f. ethics | relevant |
| g. confessed | regulating |
| h. pertinent | negatively |
| i. face up to | drug |
| j. adversely | owned up |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| a. a drink and | influence of drugs |
| b. television documentary | committee |
| c. substance | issues |
| d. under the | affect patient care |
| e. clear | aired on June 13 |
| f. ethics | rules |
| g. his profession was in | drug problem |
| h. acknowledge | denial |
| i. pertinent | abuse |
| j. adversely | the fact |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the correct spaces.

UK doctors' drink/drug problem

BNE: The British medical _____ has a drink and drug problem, according to a BBC television documentary _____ on June 13. Alcohol and substance abuse is becoming _____ common among Britain's medical _____. The programme claimed that one in 15 doctors and nurses, about 13,000 in total, has an addiction. The BBC discovered that in the past decade, 750 medical staff have been formally disciplined and _____ for being drunk or under the _____ of drugs while on _____. Reporters also found the medical profession has issued no clear rules _____ how much doctors are allowed to drink before going to work.

reprimanded
duty
disturbingly
governing
aired
influence
practitioners
profession

Dr. Michael Wilks, chairman of the British Medical Association's _____ committee, confessed to reporters that his profession was in _____. He said it needed to acknowledge the _____ it had a problem and address the _____ issues. He told the BBC: "You've got a profession that doesn't want to _____ up to the fact that it's got a problem in the _____....You've got levels of denial that make it virtually impossible for an alcoholic doctor to be helped." Dr. Vivienne Nathanson warned that _____ or dependence on alcohol and drugs would adversely affect patient care. She added: "Doctors work in very stressful environments in a _____ where it is difficult to seek help."

denial
culture
misuse
face
fact
pertinent
ranks
ethics

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'medical' and 'profession'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT DOCTORS SURVEY: In pairs / groups write down questions about doctors and their professional responsibilities.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| • profession | • ethics |
| • disturbingly | • denial |
| • one | • pertinent |
| • decade | • ranks |
| • reprimanded | • dependence |
| • influence | • culture |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Were you surprised when you saw this headline?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Has this article changed your opinion of British doctors?
- d. What is your opinion of the medical profession?
- e. Are you happy with the doctors in your country?
- f. What country do you think has the best medical profession?
- g. Have you ever come across a bad doctor?
- h. Should a doctor who works under the influence be banned for life?
- i. Who's to blame for doctors being drunk on duty, the doctors, the hospitals or the medical profession?
- j. Should the rules be the same for general doctors and surgeons?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. Do you think it's acceptable for doctors to go to work with a hangover?
- c. What kind of rules concerning alcohol do you think doctors must adhere to?
- d. Would you like to be a doctor?
- e. What do you think are the stresses in a doctor's job?
- f. What would you do if the doctor who was treating you smelled of alcohol?
- g. Do you think substance abuse among doctors is something new?
- h. Is it worse for a doctor or a nurse to be drunk while on duty?
- i. Why do you think it is so difficult for doctors to seek help?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

STRESS COUNSELOR: You are a stress counselor for people in stressful jobs. It is your job to (1) identify the stresses involved in two jobs, (2) assign a score from 1 to 10 for each type of stress (10 = most stressful) and (3) recommend stress reduction measures to alleviate those stresses. Discuss your ideas with your fellow counselors in your group and write them in the table. Students A talk together about doctors and English teachers, Students B talk about the US President and artists.

JOB	STRESSES	1-10	STRESS REDUCTION MEASURES
Doctor	• • • •		• • • •
English teacher	• • • •		• • • •

JOB	STRESSES	1-10	STRESS REDUCTION MEASURES
US President	• • • •		• • • •
Artist	• • • •		• • • •

Change partners so that Students A talk to Students B. Explain what you discussed with your previous partner(s). Give each other feedback on your counseling ideas. Are they good or bad? Will the stress reduction measures be effective?

Return to your original partners and discuss and agree on any revisions you made.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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Dr. Michael Wilks, chairman of the British Medical Association's ethics committee, confessed to reporters that his _____. He said it needed to acknowledge the fact it had a problem and _____. He told the BBC: "You've got a profession that doesn't want to _____ that it's got a problem in the ranks....You've got _____ that make it virtually impossible for an alcoholic doctor to be helped." Dr. Vivienne Nathanson warned that _____ on alcohol and drugs would _____ patient care. She added: "Doctors work in very stressful environments in a culture where it is difficult to seek help."

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the BBC documentary and its report on British doctors. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. STRESS: Write about the stresses involved in your job. What do you do to cope with or alleviate the stress? Explain to your classmates what you wrote in your next lesson. Do you have similar stresses and ways of coping?

4. A LETTER: Write a letter to the British Medical Association. Tell it what you think of the situation in which one in 15 of its medical staff has drink and drug problems. Read your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. F b. T c. F d. F e. F f. T g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. drink | alcohol |
| b. aired | screened |
| c. substance | drug |
| d. reprimanded | admonished |
| e. governing | regulating |
| f. ethics | morality |
| g. confessed | owned up |
| h. pertinent | relevant |
| i. face up to | recognize |
| j. adversely | negatively |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| a. a drink and | drug problem |
| b. television documentary | aired on June 13 |
| c. substance | abuse |
| d. under the | influence of drugs |
| e. clear | rules |
| f. ethics | committee |
| g. his profession was in | denial |
| h. acknowledge | the fact |
| i. pertinent | issues |
| j. adversely | affect patient care |

GAP FILL:

UK doctors' drink/drug problem

BNE: The British medical **profession** has a drink and drug problem, according to a BBC television documentary **aired** on June 13. Alcohol and substance abuse is becoming **disturbingly** common among Britain's medical **practitioners**. The programme claimed that one in 15 doctors and nurses, about 13,000 in total, has an addiction. The BBC discovered that in the past decade, 750 medical staff have been formally disciplined and **reprimanded** for being drunk or under the **influence** of drugs while on **duty**. Reporters also found the medical profession has issued no clear rules **governing** how much doctors are allowed to drink before going to work.

Dr. Michael Wilks, chairman of the British Medical Association's **ethics** committee, confessed to reporters that his profession was in **denial**. He said it needed to acknowledge the **fact** it had a problem and address the **pertinent** issues. He told the BBC: "You've got a profession that doesn't want to **face** up to the fact that it's got a problem in the **ranks**....You've got levels of denial that make it virtually impossible for an alcoholic doctor to be helped." Dr. Vivienne Nathanson warned that **misuse** or dependence on alcohol and drugs would adversely affect patient care. She added: "Doctors work in very stressful environments in a **culture** where it is difficult to seek help."