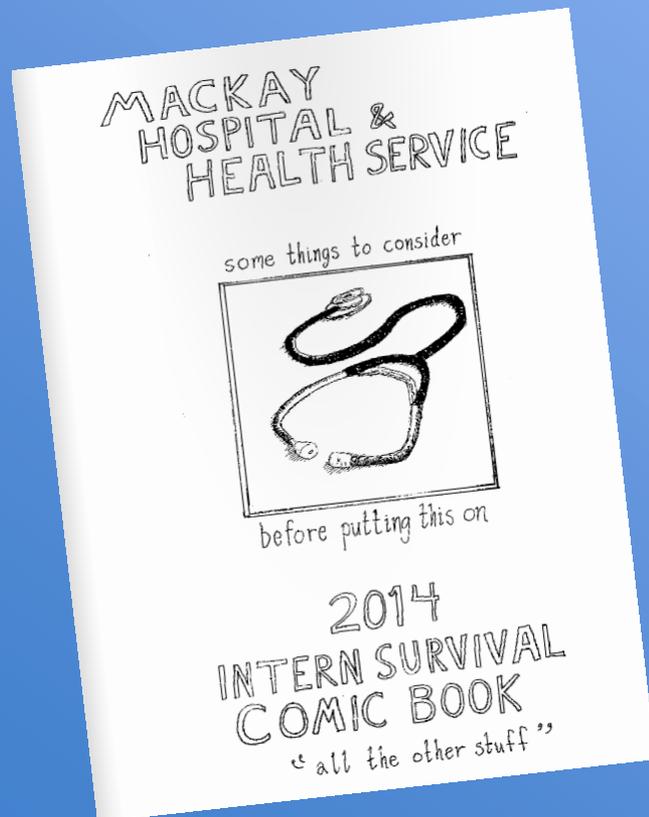


# Improving Intern Wellbeing with Graphic Medicine



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# Background: Levels of psychological distress in young doctors

A study by Beyond Blue released in November, 2013, showed that doctors report higher than average rates of suicide and depression compared to the general population.

Figure 1: Levels of very high psychological distress by gender in doctors, the Australian population and other Australian professionals aged 30 years and below

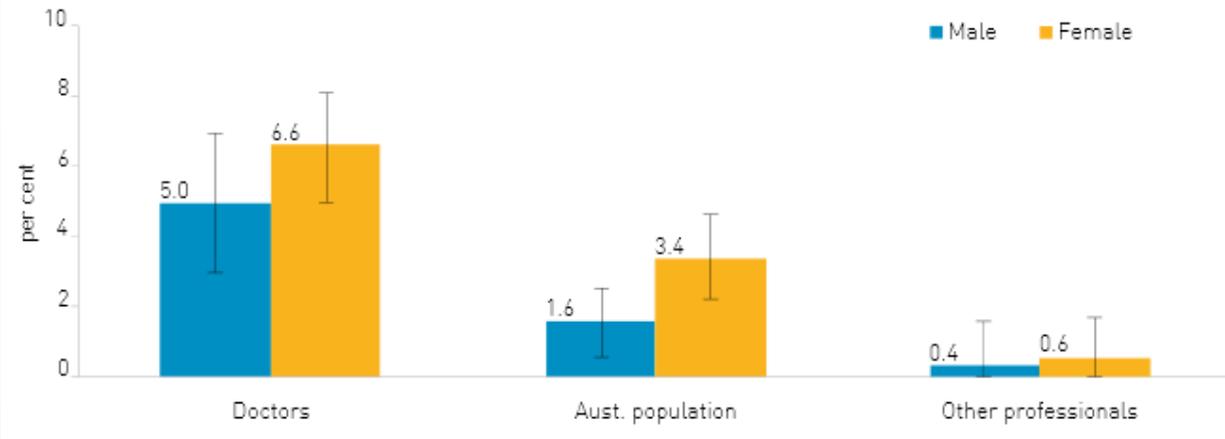
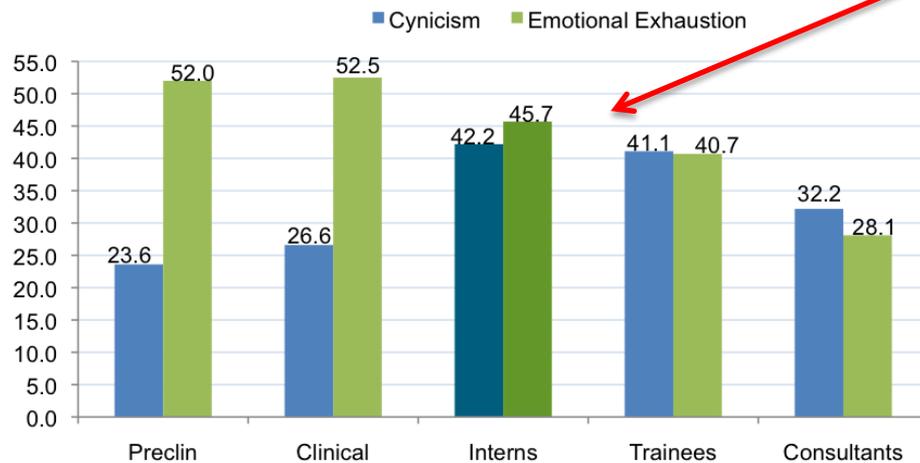


Figure 2: Percentage of survey respondents displaying very high levels of cynicism, and emotional exhaustion, by training level



Young doctors appear to be the most psychologically distressed, with interns reporting the highest levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

According to the study, "The transition from study to work appears to be a particularly stressful period"

# Aims and Methods

In response to this recommendation from the Beyond Blue study about improving the mental health of doctors:

“Education and training in positive coping strategies and stress minimisation (which) ... could build the resilience of students and young doctors. This may involve the development of pilot programs to test methodology and the effectiveness of these education programs”

*National Mental Health Survey of Doctors and Medical Students: Final Report*

... our research attempts to address this need by creating an **educational handbook for interns** which incorporates the strategies of

**Graphic Medicine,**

and running a series of trials to test the effectiveness of this approach.

Working with the staff of the Medical Education Unit at Mackay Base Hospital, we developed a curriculum for the handbook to address the emotional and interpersonal aspects of being a new doctor that are rarely discussed during Intern Orientation.

The next step was to present this curriculum through **Graphic Medicine...**

# What IS Graphic Medicine?

“a combination of word and image, narration and juxtaposition . . . the capacity to articulate aspects of social experience that escape both the normal realms of medicine and the comforts of canonical literature.”

*Squier SM Literature and Medicine  
2008;27.2:pp124-152*

Over the past five years, Graphic Medicine has emerged as a branch of Medical Humanities focusing on the intersections between medicine and comics (graphic novels, web-comics, comic books, et al). This growing body of literature strongly suggests that comics can be useful tools for expanding the ways that doctors think.

“To read a comic effectively, you must understand not only what is overtly seen and said but also what is implied.”

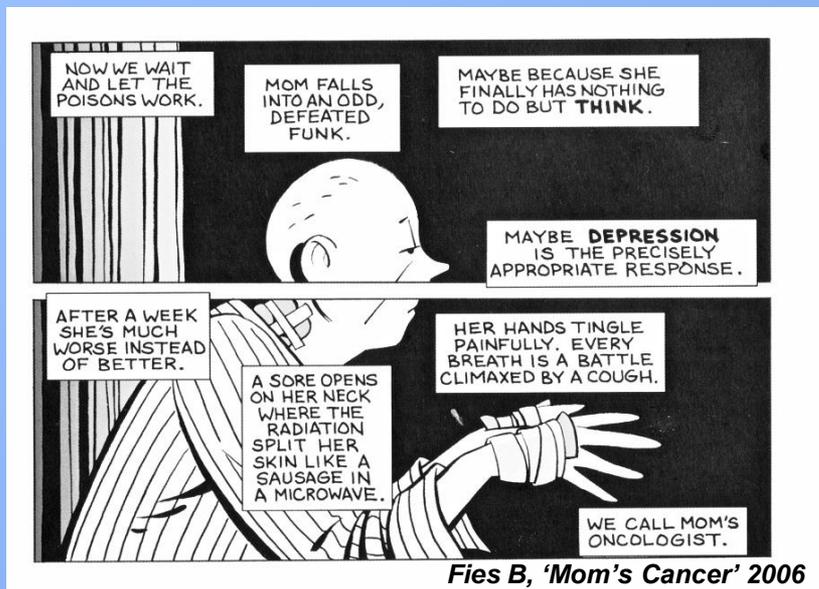
*Green M J , and Myers K R BMJ 2010;340:bmj.c863*



What does this image (from the graphic novel *Cancer Vixen*), imply about the doctor/patient interaction?

“The depiction of illness influences the perception of illness, which can change the illness experience for others.”

*Williams I, Hektoen International 2011;3.4*



Much of the existing literature on graphic medicine has focused either on educating patients, or helping doctors better understand patient experiences.

Our work is an attempt to create comics for doctors to help them examine their own pathologies, and the organisational pathologies of their hospitals.

# The Comic Handbook



The finished handbook was a 20-page comic that discussed mental health, interpersonal communication, time management and coping strategies.

The book was distributed to incoming interns at Mackay along with other orientation materials.

To see a scan of the entire publication, scan this QR code or visit



[www.aaronhumphrey.com](http://www.aaronhumphrey.com)

*Dogged by*

Oh, no problem.

Thanks so much, doc.

You're going to be just fine!

what is the point of ANYTHING?

BLACK DOG

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More than 25% of doctors\* have a minor psychiatric disorder like depression or anxiety.

40% of doctors believe that doctors who have depression or anxiety are less respected by their colleagues.

This stigma means many doctors are reluctant to get help they need.

sure, of course I can cover for you tonight - what? No, I'm fine... I'm fine.

---

The stigma is unfounded - and DANGEROUS - it may contribute to the higher rates of suicide in doctors compared to the general public.

- Many great people have struggled with mental illnesses.

Churchill

Take heart! With help, we can keep these beasts on a leash!

Great Mental Health resources online

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**HELP is AVAILABLE!**

↳ 24 hour hotlines ↳

→ QLD Employee Assistance Program  
☎ 1 300 361 008

→ Doctors' Health Advisory Service  
☎ 07 3872 2222

→ Lifeline - ☎ 13 11 14

→ Suicide Advice - ☎ 1300 659 467

→ Drug & Alcohol counselling  
☎ 1 800 888 236

<http://ama.com.au/doctorshealth>  
<http://jmohealth.org.au>

\* Statistics taken from Beyond Blues National Mental Health Survey of Doctors & Med Students

# More pages from the Intern Handbook comic:

## BURNOUT/COMPASSION FATIGUE

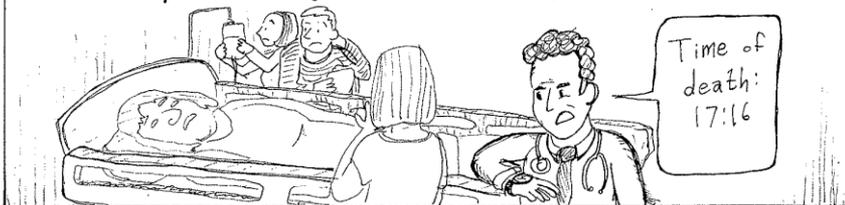
There is a huge emotional component to this job



The first time a patient dies, you may cry ...

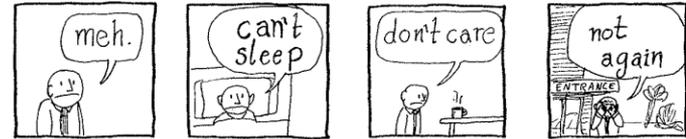


Eventually, you might be more depressed that —



— death sort of ... stops registering ...

## DX: Compassion Fatigue



because the patients never stop coming and there is always something to care about...

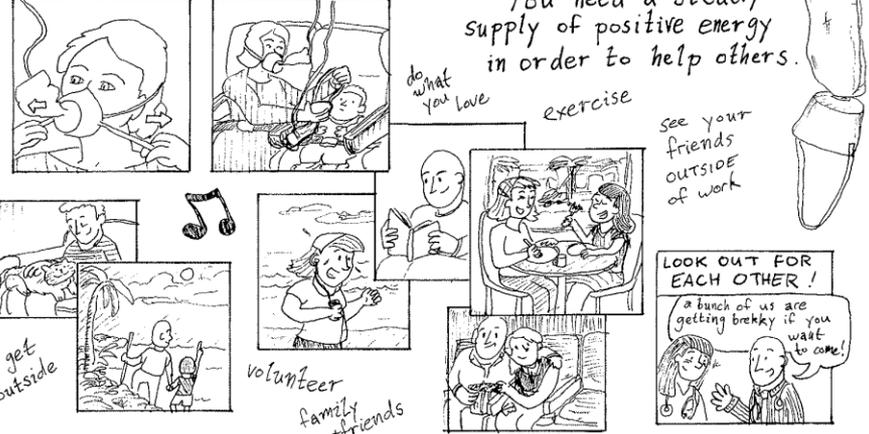


RX: O<sub>2</sub> (at least) QID



You have to put on your own mask first

You need a steady supply of positive energy in order to help others.



Although the bag may not appear to inflate, oxygen is flowing

# Conclusion, acknowledgements and further research

We will conduct formal surveys at the end of the 2014 intern year to gauge how effective this publication has been in helping to prepare interns for the emotional and interpersonal challenges of being doctors.

Preliminary, informal feedback from the interns who received the comic seemed very positive-- Several interns approached the researchers to express gratitude for the comic, and others were spotted carrying it on the wards.

Many other areas of medical education could potentially benefit from a Graphic Medicine approach to printed materials. We hope to explore the efficacy and implications of these approaches in the future.



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