

Editorial

Doctors on the verge of a nervous breakdown

Tessa Turnbull, editor and Katikati GP

When my Katikati colleagues and I looked for an audit topic for 1999-2000 that had personal relevance and might positively change our practice, we looked no further than *Self Care for GPs*.

We duly paid our money to the RNZCGP Quality Assurance Unit and the workbook and background reading arrived in the return post. We had at that time not read the excellent papers published in the focus section of this issue.

In our practice, the partners are of varying ages and different sexes and have quite different domestic circumstances, although these are all stable. We did not appreciate, when we first sat down and worked through the initial checklists and exercises, that we all came from "dysfunctional families" (as detailed by Dr Carey-Smith in his paper) but we would have acknowledged that all our "parents had excessive expectations" of us.

At our first group meeting we worked singly and then together through exercises 3 and 5 *Assessment of Type A personality* and *Self care assessment*. I guess it was not too much of a surprise to discover that we are all Type A personalities but it was much to our chagrin and concern we determined that universally we had deficient self-care skills. Not just "needing some help" but clearly deficient and fitting Dr Carey-Smith's criteria of "low self-esteem, need for affirmation, and over-achieving people-pleasers". And not only did we come from "dysfunctional families" it was pretty obvious that we were in the process of creating them ourselves, in truly traditional fashion.

Not that it is all bad news. We are undertaking the self-care audit and we are all making positive lifestyle changes. We schedule one day off a week to "be quiet, think, meditate or pray or just do something for fun".

That's the theory anyway.

We cannot stop being Type A personalities but we can smooth off some of the excesses.

In the manner of good health this means swimming, walking and other

means of regular exercise. It means not mixing business (being on call) with socialising, not so easy to do in the country with frequent on call-duties.

We are probably having more trouble with establishing a "close confidante/mentor relationship outside the practice and family" and not self prescribing under any circumstances as we are used to taking "dead mans pills".

We are very aware of professional burnout, all having come perilously close to this at times for various reasons. (For myself, I was rescued in the nick of time by a broken right hand and an eight-week enforced practice layoff.

Now from feeling continually stressed and isolated I am once again enjoying work enormously.)

I say "we" because I feel looking critically at self-care has been good for all of us regardless of the extent of individual change.

The truth will come out, as we are soon to revisit the audit protocol to put a measurement to the lifestyle changes we promised ourselves.