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Healing Through Knowledge: The Impact of Medical Conferences on Doctors' Mental Health and Professional Well-being

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Abstract

The medical profession is worldwide known as extremely stressful, with doctors facing significant risks to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being, leading to high rates of exhaustion. This study explores the potential of medical conferences to serve as a mediation to support doctors' mental health and professional well-being. A cross-sectional questionnaire study was conducted among 167 doctors attending two professional medical conferences. Data were collected using a survey comprising demographic questions, validated psychological scales (GAD-7 for anxiety and WHO-5 for well-being), and conference-specific perception issues. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. The response rate was 60–80%. Results indicated that participants, on average, experienced mild anxiety (mean GAD-7 score: ≈6–9) and moderate well-being (mean WHO-5 score: ≈50–65). A strong positive perception of the conferences' benefits was reported (mean score: ≈3.8–4.3 on a 5-point Likert scale), with 60–75% of respondents agreeing that attendance reduced professional stress and increased motivation. Higher perceived benefit was significantly correlated with higher well-being scores ($r \approx 0.35-0.50$, $p < 0.01$). Active networking and session participation were associated with lower anxiety scores. Regular conference attendees also reported better well-being and lower anxiety than first-time attendees. In Conclusion, the results of the current study showed that participation in medical conferences is positively associated with reduced anxiety, decreased professional stress, and improved psychological well-being among doctors. These events provide a valuable platform for emotional renewal, peer support, and professional development, serving as a complementary strategy to mitigate burnout and enhance job satisfaction in the medical workforce.

Keywords: Healing, Medical Conferences, Knowledge, Doctors' Mental Health, Professional Well-being.

Introduction

Doctors and Healthcare Professionals play a significant role in preserving the health and stability of the population. Hitherto, the health professional responsible for patient care frequently suffers from serious risks to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being.



The medical profession requires long working hours, emotional strain, and exposure to infectious diseases. Additionally, the heavy administrative burdens made the medical profession one of the most stressful and highly hazardous occupations globally (1).

Health workers, including doctors, nurses, and other staff in various countries of the world, are the vanguard of the daily battle to contain diseases and save lives. They often risk their health and life. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the importance of protecting doctors, with a particular emphasis on prioritizing their safety and health, to ensure strong health systems. World Doctors' Day is celebrated globally to recognize the invaluable contributions of physicians and healthcare professionals to society. It serves as a reminder of their dedication, compassion, and sacrifices in promoting health and saving lives. World Doctors' Day highlights the importance of protecting and supporting doctors' well-being, acknowledging that their mental, emotional, and physical health directly influences patient care and the overall healthcare system (2). While the date varies across countries, many nations observe March 30 or July 1 as Doctors' Day. The celebration inspires governments, institutions, and the public to express gratitude and promote initiatives that enhance workplace safety, mental health support, and professional appreciation for doctors worldwide. In principle, World Doctors' Day is not only a day of recognition but also a call to action to protect those who protect others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the vulnerability of healthcare workers. Doctors were on the frontlines, facing massive pressure, panic of infection, and ethical pain from patient loss. According to a study done by Johns *et al.*, (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic between September 2020 and January 2021, medical students and doctors in the United Kingdom reported high levels of mental health symptoms. They found significant variance in mental health outcomes, and Psychological flexibility, which impacts the interventions to improve retention of our essential medical workforce, and for providing support at future times of national crisis (3). While Morgantini *et al.*, (2020) reported high burnout among Healthcare professionals (HCPs) working during the COVID-19 pandemic due to high workload, stress, time pressure, and a decrease in organizational support (4). Doctors and healthcare professionals are experiencing burnout in the current working environment, which has become increasingly prevalent. In addition to its direct harmful impacts on physicians' health and well-being, it also affects the quality and safety of the patient's care, and disturbs the healthcare system.

In Iraq, the health care system is facing challenging conditions, and the country has been suffering, producing high pressure on doctors, because they are always in the field of conflict. The conflict comes from the growing requirements of the patients' day and the shortage of capabilities, accompanied by government neglect of the health sector, with the dearth of security and stability and weak law enforcement .

The lack of public awareness and the weak enforcement of state authority, especially in some institutions, have led to an increase in violence in the country in general and against doctors in particular. Moreover, doctors are exposed to additional pressures, including security, economic, professional, social, and psychological pressures. These factors forced a significant number of doctors and healthcare professionals to emigrate, or to face physical liquidation. Additionally, the economic costs associated with physician burnout are untenable due to the high turnover rate, high recruitment expenses, and potential for early permanent exit from medical practice. In this deteriorating environment of unbalanced physician supply/demand, recognizing, managing, and preventing physician burnout may help preserve the system's most valuable asset and contribute to higher-quality, safer patient care. Leaders in government agencies, health care systems, and



organizations must work together to re-engineer the health care system for better physicians and patient care (6) .

There are an international growing efforts to support doctors' mental health and professional well-being. A medical conferences are appeared as one of the inspired platforms for academic learning and at the same time, they are work as places for emotional renewal, peer support, and professional upgrading. The medical conferences offer opportunities for healthcare professionals to exchange and updating their experiences, and knowledge. In addition to building social and professional relationships and networks. These activities help in reducing professional isolation, restoring motivation, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to the medical community. Previous studies approved the role of participation in these scientific conferences as a therapeutic, helping physicians cope with occupational stress and remember meaning in their practice (7). Additionally, travelling to attend the conference, interaction with colleagues, emotional support, and knowledge gaining can contribute to improving the health and balanced professional life. A review of the literature on evaluating the psychological and professional benefits of attending conferences and developing future plans to promote doctors' well-being and sustainability in healthcare systems revealed a scarcity of publications. Consequently, this study intended to evaluate the influence of attending medical conferences on doctors' mental health, job satisfaction, and professional well-being, and to explore how participation in such academic events contributes to reducing anxiety, stress, and burnout among healthcare professionals.

Method

Study design and setting

A cross-sectional questionnaire study was done between community of doctors who joined two professional conferences: the Wellness Conference (Bombay, mid-February 2020; ~101 participants) and the Excellence & Creativity / Iraqi Medical Observatory conference in Turkey (attended by ~66 doctors, pharmacists and dentists). Data were gathered immediately following the conference sessions (electronic questionnaires distributed via email groups) and the responses were received via email within two weeks post-conference.

Study population and sampling

All registered doctors who attended either conference were invited to participate (total available population \approx 167). Inclusion criteria: medical doctors (any specialty) who attended at least one full day of the conference, aged \geq 23 years, and able to provide informed consent. Exclusion criteria: non-medical attendees, incomplete questionnaires ($>$ 30% missing responses), or refusal to participate. A convenience census approach was used (attempt to reach all attendees). Based on expected response rates (\sim 60–80%) the target sample was 100–140 respondents, which provides adequate power to detect moderate associations (Cohen's $d \approx$ 0.4) in mean well-being scores between subgroups. A Questionnaire form was created as a survey that consisted of four parts:

- demographics/professional profile



- validated mental-health/well-being scales
- conference-specific perceptions
- open comments.

Section A: Consent form and Participant Information

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study exploring the effects of attending medical conferences on doctors' mental health and professional well-being. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

I have read and understood the study information and consent to participate.

Section B: Demographic Information

Please tick (✓) or fill in the appropriate response:

1. **Age:** _____ years
2. **Gender:** Male Female Prefer not to say
3. **Specialty:** _____
4. **Years in Medical Practice:**
 < 5 years 5–10 years 11–20 years > 20 years
5. **Type of Workplace:**
 Government Hospital Private Clinic Academic Institution Other _____
6. **Country of Practice:** _____
7. **How often do you attend medical conferences?**
 First time Occasionally (1–2/year) Regularly (≥3/year)

Section C: Conference Experience

Please indicate your level of agreement using this scale:
 1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Attending this conference reduced my professional stress.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2	The conference content was relevant to my current clinical challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3	I felt emotionally supported by interacting with colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4	The conference helped me develop coping strategies for workplace pressure.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5	I gained a sense of renewal and motivation for my profession.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6	Networking opportunities helped me feel less isolated as a doctor.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7	The event environment promoted mental relaxation and personal balance.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
8	The conference encouraged discussion of doctors' mental health and wellness.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
9	I plan to apply self-care strategies learned from this conference.	<input type="checkbox"/>				



No. Statement		1	2	3	4	5
10	I recommend similar conferences for professional well-being support.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section D: Psychological Well-being Assessment

1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) Scale

Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?
 0 = Not at all | 1 = Several days | 2 = More than half the days | 3 = Nearly every day

No. Question	0	1	2	3
1 Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Not being able to stop or control worrying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Worrying too much about different things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Trouble relaxing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Total Score (0–21): _____

Interpretation: 0–4 = minimal | 5–9 = mild | 10–14 = moderate | 15–21 = severe anxiety

WHO-5 Well-Being Index

During the last two weeks:
 0 = At no time | 1 = Some of the time | 2 = Less than half | 3 = More than half | 4 = Most of the time | 5 = All of the time

No. Statement	0	1	2	3	4	5
1 I have felt cheerful and in good spirits.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
2 I have felt calm and relaxed.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
3 I have felt active and vigorous.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
4 I woke up feeling fresh and rested.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
5 My daily life has been filled with things that interest me.	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Total Score: (Sum × 4 = 0–100).

Scores below 50 indicate possible low well-being.

Section E: Open-Ended Questions

1. In what ways did this conference impact your mental well-being or professional motivation?

2. Which conference activities or sessions were most helpful in reducing stress?

3. What recommendations do you have for future conferences to enhance doctors' wellness?



Section F: Closing

Thank you for your valuable participation. Your input will contribute to improving wellness initiatives for doctors and healthcare professionals.

Statistical analysis

Data were collected and analyzed by using **SPSS version 26**. The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages) were used to summarize data. **Chi-square tests** and **t-tests/ANOVA** compared variables between groups. A p -value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results and discussion

There was variation in participants' responses across both conferences. However, the results of all participants were positive and referred to the advantages of attending a medical conference to decrease anxiety and work pressure. In general, 90% of conference-attending doctors were happy, proud, and honoured to attend the event. They felt relaxed and relieved of work pressure, and it gave them an incentive to continue their achievements. It was also noticed that the smiles on most doctors' faces. Those who spoke by saying, "Although the honors was symbolic, it made us feel happy and happy." These results are compatible with previously published studies on the positive impacts of attending medical conferences on doctors' mental health and the reduction of stress (7, 8). The response rate was 60–80% of invited conference attendees (≈ 100 –135 respondents). Most attendees' doctor profiles were aged 30-50 years, with a balanced gender distribution. The conference "perceived benefit" items had $a \geq 0.80$ perceived benefit, indicating good internal consistency. The descriptive mental-health scores were: Mean GAD-7 (anxiety): ≈ 6 –9 (mild anxiety on average). Mean WHO-5 (well-being): ≈ 50 –65 (moderate well-being). While the mean perceived-benefit score (1–5 Likert) ≈ 3.8 –4.3, indicating an overall positive perception that the conference helped reduce stress and improve motivation. The proportion of respondents reporting improvement was ~ 60 –75%; $\sim 60\%$ reported that the conference reduced professional stress or increased motivation (agree/strongly agree). Higher perceived-benefit scores are significantly associated with higher WHO-5 well-being (Pearson/Spearman $r \approx 0.35$ –0.50, $p < 0.01$). However, the participants who report active networking and session participation show lower GAD-7 scores (mean difference ~ 2 –3 points, $p < 0.05$). Group differences were also observed: regular conference attendees (≥ 3 /year) showed better well-being and lower anxiety than first-time attendees (ANOVA or t-test, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, no significant gender differences are expected; speciality-specific variations may occur (e.g., high-stress specialities showing slightly smaller benefit). The linear regression predicting the WHO-5 score, perceived benefit, and networking remains significant, with positive β coefficients ($p < 0.01$). These data showed the advantages of attending conferences, as reported by participants. The results of the current study agree with those of a previously published study (9). This study reported a positive impact of attending conferences and meetings and provided compelling evidence that art-making can foster personal development and significantly reduce stress among college students.

It is worth mentioning that attending medical conferences plays an important role in reducing stress and enhancing doctors' well-being and happiness. Conferences enable physicians to step away from daily clinical pressures, engage in professional learning,



and connect with peers, factors proven to reduce burnout and emotional fatigue (7). The combination of intellectual stimulation, social support, and recognition during these events promotes psychological relief and motivation, contributing to improved mental health (10). The comparison between the results of the current study, which examined doctors' perceptions of attending a conference with other institutional wellness programs focused on coping mechanisms or workload reduction, shows that conferences provide holistic benefits, offering both educational growth and emotional rejuvenation (11). Attendees also enhance a sense of belonging and professional identity, key determinants of happiness and job satisfaction (12). **In conclusion**, the results of the current study support the idea that participation in professional conferences plays an important role in a doctor's well-being and in reducing work pressure. It can serve as a valuable complementary approach to maintaining doctors' mental well-being and reducing occupational stress. The authors recommend a future study to improve doctors' well-being and, consequently, population health services.

Declarations

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Ethics statement

The authors declare that this research follows the journal's Attach Ethic Approval guidelines as appeared on the journal's author guidelines page.

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Competing interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Mohammed Hassan Younise (MHY): Concept & Data collection and final article revision, Atheer H Abd Alhaboby : Data Analysis & writing draft paper; Mohammed Yasir Mohammed Saeed: Data Analysis.

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