

## **What makes for a happier safer doctor ?**

Most of us are not as aware as we should be of the influence emotions have on everything we do and everything we think. In sport for example, it is easy to see how athletes, golfers, soccer players etc can underperform when they are upset or lacking in motivation. At the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, the psychology of human performance has been applied to a training programme for surgeons, emergency medicine doctors and ophthalmologists. Eva Doherty, a clinical psychologist is director of the Human Factors and Patient Safety training and research programme which is designed to equip trainee doctors with the emotional skills to help them get the best possible results.

The design of the course was based on the premise that becoming expert in the identification and management of emotions leads to better communication with patients, relatives and colleagues leading to greater levels of patient satisfaction and outcomes. Emotional intelligence is an important concept which informs the workshops and the emotional intelligence or 'EQ' of prospective trainees is now assessed before they are chosen onto the programme. Trainees are given leave from their duties in hospital to attend day long workshops in small groups to work together to tackle topics such as crisis management, conflict resolution, breaking bad news, teamwork, leadership etc. Scenarios are simulated using professional actors and sometimes even set up in a mock operating theatre or an emergency medicine department.

When the programme was first introduced nine years ago, there was a degree of resistance to the notion that doctors needed this kind of training. The belief at the time was that doctors were highly intelligent individuals with excellent instincts and interpersonal skills and that they did not need this kind of 'touchy-feely' kind of training. The world of aviation faced a similar challenge in the late 70's when it became clear that there was an unacceptable number of fatal air disasters and that 70% of the errors made were due to human factor issues such as communication errors, interpersonal issues amongst crew members, cognitive errors etc. Probably the most significant shift in culture that the aviation industry has successfully addressed is the reduction of hierarchy issues among crew members which has aided the early identification of problems and the reporting of incidents and near misses on a daily basis. It has been said that medicine is about 40 years behind aviation in this regard.

Human beings pay attention to what matters most to them and so a critical component of the Human Factors and Patient Safety programme is that it must be an integral part of the overall training which they complete. Attendance at the three annual workshops is mandatory over five years of the training programme and each year, the trainees' interpersonal skills are assessed in simulations and the results of these count towards whether or not they will be allowed to progress into the next year. This kind of training is growing in popularity in other countries and is steadily ensuring that we can look forward to safer, happier and more effective doctors in our hospitals in the near future.