

Mental Health for Doctors: Your Foundation for Success

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A psychiatrist's essential advice for healthcare students

As a healthcare student, you're building habits that will define your entire career. Mental health for doctors isn't just about surviving healthcare education – it's about thriving throughout your professional journey.

MIPS member, Professor Andrew Teodorczuk, a psychiatrist with 25 years of experience, knows the importance of wellbeing in medicine. His curiosity about how people think, feel and behave drew him to psychiatry, and he still considers it a privilege to walk beside patients in their times of need. Alongside his clinical work, he is passionate about interprofessional education, work-based learning and sharing mental health strategies that support doctors throughout their careers.

1. You're Not Superhuman (and That's Okay)

One of the most important lessons Professor Teodorczuk shares with students is to let go of the idea that doctors are superhuman. Medicine can be deeply rewarding, but also demanding – and it's normal to need support.

"There are many times when we need to reach out, whether that's to a GP, a colleague, or a peer," he says. "It's not weak to speak. Our connections keep us grounded and support us."

His own journey has been shaped by excellent mentors and GPs, and he encourages students to start building these support networks early.

 **Action: Build your support network now.**

- Connect with senior students, registrars and supervisors
- Identify approachable clinicians who can provide guidance
- Reach out early – don't wait until things feel overwhelming

2. Building Your Wellbeing Toolkit

Another essential step is developing a toolkit for your wellbeing. This begins with recognising what drains your energy and what restores it, then actively making space for the things that help you decompress.

For Professor Teodorczuk, playing baseball in a Masters team offers a complete break from the pressures of medicine. "Practising medicine can be challenging at times, and if we've invested all our identity in it, that can be very difficult," he explains. "But if there are other parts of us, we can manage better."

 **Self-check:**

- What energises you outside healthcare?
- What drains your energy during study/placement?
- How can you protect time for your interests?

3. The Power of Mentorship

If he could give one piece of advice to his younger self, Professor Teodorczuk says it would be to find mentors earlier. Mentors help you see the bigger picture when you're struggling, and they don't need to be part of a formal program.

Successful mentorship starts with taking initiative: noticing professionals whose values or skills you admire and asking if they'd be open to a coffee and a conversation. Most clinicians are willing to help, and even occasional check-ins can provide reassurance and perspective.

How to approach a mentor:

- “I really admire your approach to [area].”
- “I’m hoping to develop my skills in [area] and wondered if you’d be open to occasional mentoring conversations.”
- “I’d love to catch up over coffee and learn from your experience.”

4. Be Proactive About Your Wellbeing

Professor Teodorczuk also stresses the importance of planning ahead. Building resilience isn’t something you do once things get difficult – it’s about putting supports in place early.

This might mean establishing a relationship with a GP while you’re well or scheduling regular exercise into your week before study and clinical placements intensify.

✂ **Tip:** See your GP when you’re well so they know your baseline – this makes it easier to identify changes when stress builds.

He also reminds students to hold onto perspective: “Always remember what a privilege it is to be a doctor. If you do encounter challenging situations, focus on what is in the best interest of your patients. Use that as a compass to guide your decisions.”

5. Choosing Psychiatry

Professor Teodorczuk’s own career path was shaped by his early fascination with the mind. While he explored other specialties including emergency medicine, he ultimately returned to psychiatry and has never looked back.

“As psychiatrists, we get to develop a very complex level of understanding of illness and can make a huge difference,” he reflects. “It’s an enormous privilege to be able to talk to patients at a time of need.”

6. Putting Health First

Quite early in his career, Professor Teodorczuk recognised that doctors’ health must come first. “If we are not well, it can impact our ability to practise,” he explains. “So, taking time to look after one’s own mental health is paramount to being a good clinician.”

Over 25 years, he has seen medical culture evolve. Mental health and wellness are now more prominent, supported by initiatives such as R U OK? and updated Australian Medical Council standards. As medicine becomes increasingly complex, these changes are more important than ever.

Support from MIPS

Mental health for students starts with the right foundation. MIPS student membership provides protection from day one, so you can focus on building healthy habits and support networks that will serve your healthcare career.

For membership questions, claims support or professional guidance, call 1800 061 113 or email info@mips.com.au.

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