Shawshank Redemption and Unpalatable Messages: The Wellbeing of Feedback Professionals

Lilith Arevshatian & Dr. Rachel Lewis
Kingston Business School, UK

Abstract

The study presents an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the wellbeing of healthcare feedback professionals. Nine participants engaging with patient feedback were interviewed and explain that others *just don't get* what their role entails. The vivid metaphor of Shawshank Redemption is used to describe their change agent role as *changing a super tanker's direction.* Feeling undervalued, most have experienced a *breaking point;* yet in spite of the challenges, their passion for their work is evident—perhaps *this is a vocation and I wana do it*.

Introduction

Context

- Political context has changed: coalition government
- New Department of Health policies
- NHS restructuring

PALS Patient Advice & Liaison Service — We're here to help

Front line customer service intermediaries
Between patients and organisations
Highlight gaps in the quality and safety of services

Theoretical Framework: Wellbeing (Danna & Griffin, 1999)

Preconceptions

- Emotional demands
- Underappreciated

Research Question

How is the wellbeing of FP in healthcare?

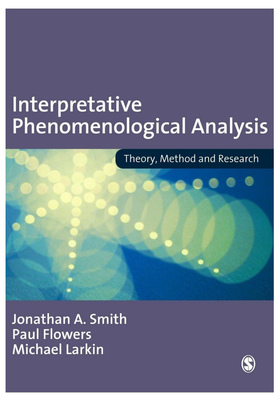
Contribution

Feedback professionals (FP) perform a critical role within the NHS however little is known about their experiences at work and how these may impact on their wellbeing—first study to investigate this.

Methodology

Aim

Gain in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences (Willig, 2008)



IPA Approach

Enter phenomenon experienced by participant
See it through their eyes
Aware that understanding based on own interpretations
Reflexivity

Sample

Purposive sample of nine FP in healthcare

Data Analysis

- Interviews transcribed
- Analysed according to Smith et al (2009)
- Iterative

Findings

Theme: "they just don't get it"

"People don't get it, they just don't GET it" (Alicia:244)

"People come in and say 'you killed my mother, you killed my mother', I've never seen your mother, but they put a photograph of somebody on the desk and say 'and this is the person, so I don't want you to forget who this person is" (Julie:122)

"in many ways my job is about bringing back unpalatable messages" (Patrick:265).

In order to face patients you put on "a mould" (Pauline:732) which Laura describes as a "plastic smile" (585)

"the Trust doesn't realise just how much we are absorbing" (Pauline: 278)

I am an "outside toilet" (Julie781)

"What have I done? Is it me?" (Alicia:155).

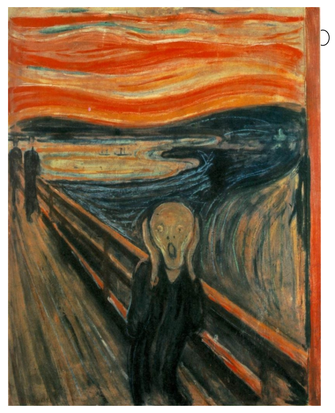
"Maybe they're right, I am useless" (Julie:781)

Theme: "breaking point"

"I do get stressed and it's noticeable in my sick record" (Adam: 144)

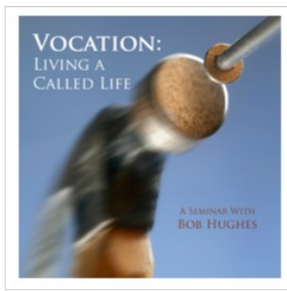
Patrick refers to Shawshank Redemption and explains "I am the rock hammer, yeah it chips away, uses the rock hammer for 20 years to chip his way out. That's what it feels like. It's like *chip, chip, chipping* away all the time" (288).

I would "come out the house and get to the bottom of the road and walk back home. I'd be in tears, I just couldn't go in [to work]" (Alicia: 49).



Changing the NHS is like "changing a super tanker's direction" (Adam)
"I'm not Paul Daniels, I can't pull it out of a hat" (Patrick:350)

Theme: "this is a vocation and I wana do it"



Pauline forms strong relationships with some of the patients, she calls them "my little boys", while Adam argues "they're not just a complainant or you know a PALS issue".

"it makes you more Machiavellian [...] one becomes more adept at ticking boxes and putting a spin".

Patrick "you do learn to play the game, who you need to say what to, to get what you want. Very Machiavellian isn't it?" (Laura:497).

Theme: "changing a super-tanker's direction"

Discussion

- FP are rich source of patient feedback on service quality & safety
- Findings show low levels of wellbeing
- Implications on organisation (e.g., absenteeism, ticking boxes) & individual (e.g., strain)
- Also important is passion - much more than customer service
- Transferability of findings to organisations with similar roles (e.g., complaints department, governing bodies such as OfCom)

References

Danna, K. & Griffin, R. (1999) Health and wellbeing in the workplace: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Management,* 25 (3), 357-384 doi: 10.1177/014920639902500305

Smith, J.A.; Flowers, P.; & Larkin, M. (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.* London: Sage.

Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing Qualitative Methods in Psychology.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Lilith Arevshatian: l.arevshatian@kingston.ac.uk