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Covid-19: RCGP apologises for covid-19 “lifestyle” event title

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The Royal College of General Practitioners has apologised for the title of an online event that seemed to describe covid-19 as a lifestyle disease.

The event, which took place on Saturday 27 June, was called “Covid-19: A lifestyle disease and the vital role GPs have in beating it.”

Many doctors raised concerns with the title on social media. Taking to Twitter, Helen Salisbury, a GP and columnist for *The BMJ*, said, “Lifestyle implies choice and to link this to covid is offensive. The things that have led people to die in great numbers—age, sex, ethnicity, poverty, diabetes, and obesity—are not choices. Very poor judgement.”¹

Natalie Silvey, an anaesthetic registrar, said on Twitter, “A lifestyle disease? I am absolutely astonished that [the RCGP] have described covid-19 as such and are running such an event. I am almost lost for words.”²

Nisreen Alwan, a public health consultant, tweeted, “Covid-19 is not a lifestyle disease, because poverty, high risk key worker jobs, crowded accommodation, access to healthcare, zero hour contracts, and having no sick pay are not ‘lifestyles.’ This is bad.”³

The RCGP issued an apology on Twitter and deleted its tweets referring to the title of the conference. “The RCGP does not consider [covid-19] to be a lifestyle disease. We recognise that the title of today’s conference could be misleading, and we apologise for any offence caused. The purpose of the conference is to support GPs to give appropriate lifestyle advice for patients,” the college said on Twitter.

Commenting on the issue, Martin Marshall, chair of the RCGP, reiterated the college’s apology. “GPs are on the frontline of tackling this terrible virus and we have lost many patients and colleagues to it. To suggest it is a lifestyle disease is wrong,” he said. “The purpose of the conference was to support GPs to offer lifestyle advice to patients generally, and by all accounts it was a productive meeting that more than 500 delegates attended.”

Marshall added, “The title and course description was misjudged and misleading, and we issued a clarification as soon as it was brought to our attention. This error should not have happened, and our sincere apologies go to our members and to our patients and communities who have been directly affected. We send our condolences to those who have been bereaved as a result of covid-19.”

1 Salisbury H. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/HelenRSalisbury/status/1276995636353736704>

2 Silvey N. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/silv24/status/1276871027151306757>

3 Alwan N. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/Dr2NisreenAlwan/status/1276870247916716032>

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