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Valuing staff in a pandemic: emergency medicine consultant Stevan Bruijns

Emergency medicine consultant Stevan Bruijns talks to **Francesca Robinson** about his passion for improving standards in his specialty

Francesca Robinson

Yeovil Hospital emergency department clinical lead Stevan Bruijns believes that a workforce that feels empowered and valued is crucial for high quality patient care.

“My team has been my strength during the pandemic,” he says. “Early on I focused on protecting my staff. I knew that if they felt safe they would give better care to patients.” Key priorities included ensuring that staff were equipped with the highest level of personal protective equipment and ensuring that there were safe spaces for them to rest.

A robust communication system was put in place, enabling information to flow backwards and forwards. “This meant people could contact me easily,” Bruijns says, “not only with suggestions that could improve our processes but also with the things they were worried about.”

Bruijns encourages staff to share their concerns—he knows from experience about the dangers of staff taking on too much and burning out, as well as the need for them to have family time. “The pandemic has forced junior doctors in the emergency department to step up and take on higher levels of responsibility than their peers from previous years,” he says. “That takes a toll and I feel it’s important to be a supportive boss and someone they can come to when they feel overloaded or are the subject of a complaint.”

Bruijns likes to lead by example, aware that the way he behaves can influence his junior colleagues. “Being a positive role model is a really important way of showing leadership and mentorship,” he says.

During his own career, Bruijns has had several role models. “I’ve been fortunate to meet some inspirational people on my way,” he says. “I really feel that I have stood on the shoulders of giants.”

Bruijns completed his medical training both in his native South Africa and in the UK and is registered as a specialist in both countries. Since coming to the UK in 2005 he has maintained an academic interest in improving care in low and middle income countries. He has led the *African Journal of Emergency Medicine* as chief editor since its founding in 2011 and serves as honorary associate professor of emergency medicine with the University of Cape Town.

Last year he was awarded the Royal College of Emergency Medicine’s William Rutherford International Award for work he has done to improve African emergency care activities and research over two decades. This has included introducing the South

African triage scale, a tool which allows nurses to triage patients attending a low resourced emergency centre; setting up a conference peer support programme; and establishment of a publication peer support network for emergency care workers.

“Winning the award has enabled me to highlight the emergency care needs for countries facing extreme resource challenges,” says Bruijns. “It’s important that we aspire to promote diversity, inclusion, and belonging and seek not just to ensure everyone has a voice, but that that voice is heard.”

Nominated by Delia Parnham-Cope

“Passionate about emergency medicine, training, and workforce development, Stevan Bruijns has galvanised the emergency department at Yeovil Hospital since becoming clinical lead.

“With a strategic head but an open door policy, Stevan has the unique ability to motivate, train, and empower the emergency department workforce.”

Delia Parnham-Cope is an emergency medicine consultant at Yeovil Hospital

To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, job title, and the reason for your nomination to arimmer@bmj.com.