



# Lightening the Load

## An Overview

In January 2022, we published '[Beyond demoralised](#)' a report summarising the repeated warnings seen in media, in commentary and in policy research, that NHS staff workload and stressors was currently at unsustainable levels, risking mass exodus and burnout and implications for safe and quality patient care (1-3). We considered **"How can staff be supported in meaningful ways?"**

### Beyond demoralised

Listening and responding to NHS frontline staff is everyone's business  
Claire Marsh and Laura Proctor  
January 2022



## Aim: To improve morale, our hypotheses.....

By helping out with the tasks on the ward/frontline and identifying what works for people, and what does not, we can find ways to improve things.

By involving managers at every level we can help build an effective two- way relationship between frontline teams and managers that leads to creative improvements.

## Methods

- Ethnography;
- Manager interviews;
- Thematic analysis to identify key pressures affecting the team;
- Creating psychologically safe spaces using cartoon illustrations depicting different staff stressors and perspectives;
- Brokering between frontline staff and their managers

## Results

Staff experience moral injury on a daily basis as a trigger to low morale e.g. being unable to consistently provide the care they aspire to give and in seeing their patients' needs go unmet.

Moral injury may lead to staff burn out and poor wellbeing, both being strongly linked to poorer patient safety outcomes, e.g. medical errors (4).

Managers struggle to hear these messages in light of their own pressured agendas.

## Conclusions

1. Sharing the cartoon illustrations enabled staff at different levels to step into each other's worlds by:
  - (a) bringing humour and lightness to difficult issues,
  - (b) supporting personal reflection on team dynamics and,
  - (c) providing advocacy for each other's challenging experiences.
2. Managers need help and legitimacy from their seniors to prioritise this work on improving staff morale as a basis for patient safety.
3. Building the relationships between frontline teams and their managers is essential in order to restore staff faith in change.



## Next steps/Future Development

- Partner with the Organisational Development staff in a programme of coaching style support for team leaders.
- Evaluate the impact and share learning.
- Continue to bridge build with managers of all levels including Trust Execs emphasising links between staff.

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