The hidden hazard: Recognising and preventing burnout.

Burnout and Belonging: Supporting Transitions in the UK Workplace

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Welcome

- Founder of Balanceology ™
- Author of Burnout to Brilliance
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Belonging = Core Human Need

- Sits at the centre of Maslow's concept of a **hierarchy of human needs**
- We cannot thrive, feel accomplished or show up as our best selves without first feeling **connected** and **accepted**
- In burnout systems we often try to access productivity and performance, whilst skipping the middle rungs of the ladder
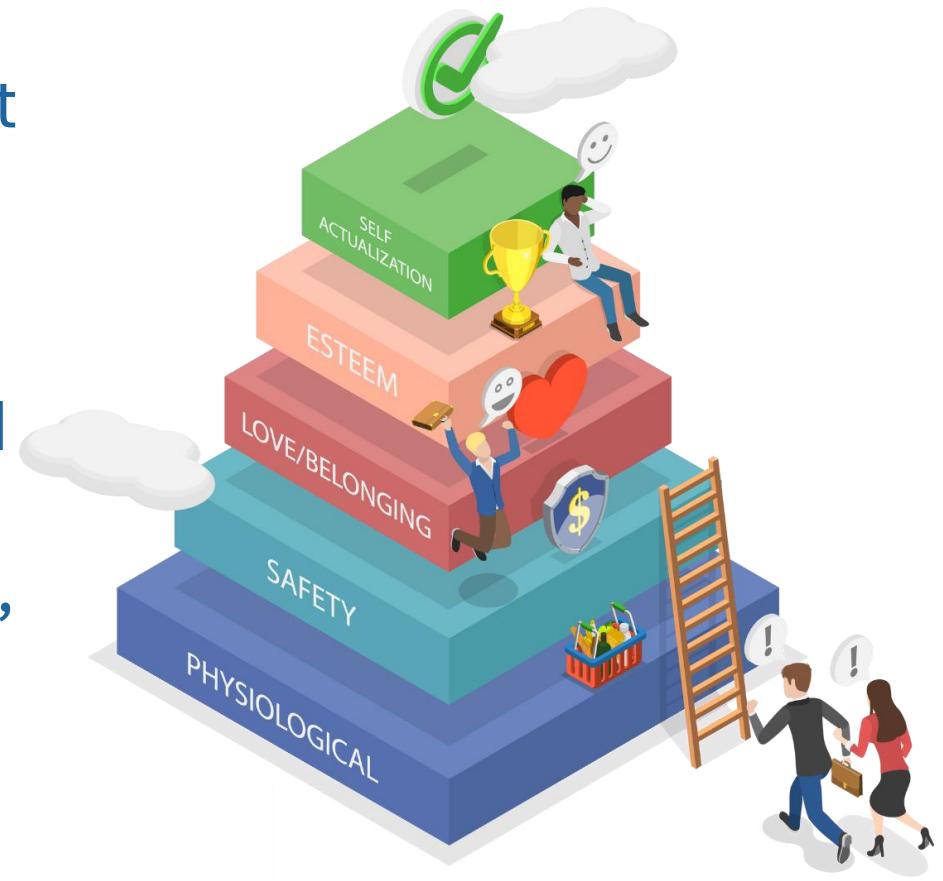
Belonging is Protective

When people feel heard, valued and supported, they're significantly more protected against burnout because these experiences form the foundation of belonging.

When those needs go unmet, stress becomes chronic, capacity erodes, and the risk of emotional exhaustion and disengagement rises sharply, not just individually, but collectively.

Unmet Needs Lead to Burnout

- Burnout begins when basic needs go unmet
- The **first three levels** of Maslow's hierarchy represent **core stabilisers**
- When foundations are missing the **nervous system is on constant alert**, eroding energy, focus and emotional resilience

LOVE/BELONGING

SAFETY
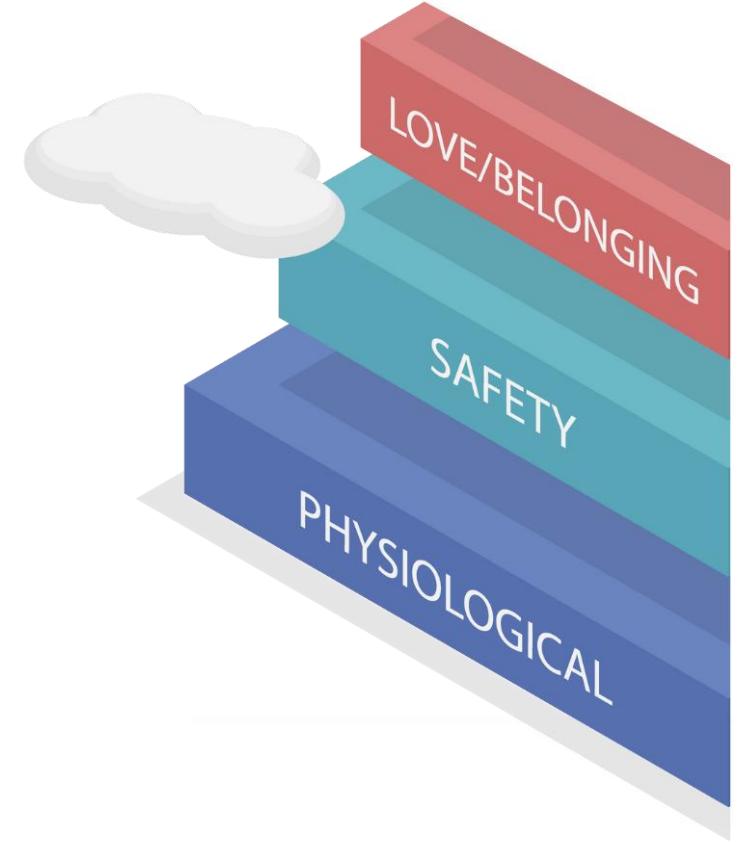
PHYSIOLOGICAL

Psychological Needs

- Sleep, rest, hydration, nourishment, breaks, time to recover, physical movement, time in nature
- In high-pressure roles, these are often the **first to be neglected**
- Chronic neglect leads to fatigue, brain fog, emotional reactivity.
- Unmet needs at this core foundational level are **classic precursor to burnout**

Safety Needs

- Job security, **psychological safety** (feeling heard, seen and valued), **manageable expectations, boundaries**
- Constant uncertainty, unspoken blame cultures, or fear of **speaking up** = high stress activation
- Excessive workload and culture of overwork keeps staff in fight/flight mode with **no space for recovery or repair**
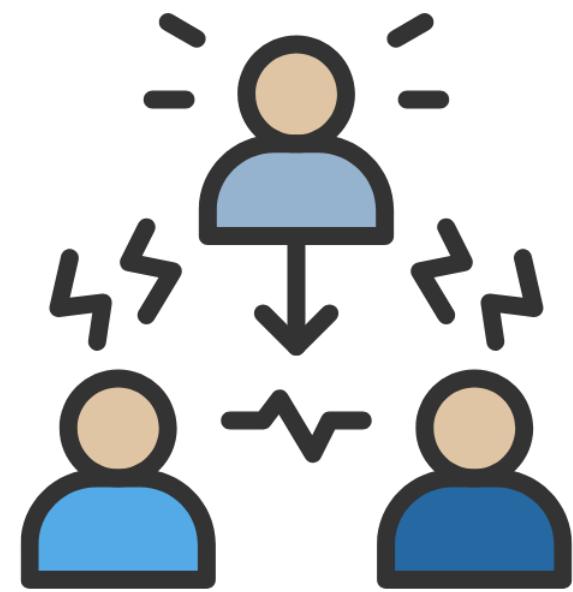
Sustainable Wellbeing

- **Collective Restoration + Operational Change**
- Speaking up / managing up to address systemic issues, bring back boundaries and balance
- Stats indicate **difference between** psychological safety at **departmental** level versus **organisational** level
- Restoration is key to having energy to **speak up**

Love & Belonging

- Experienced through connection, support, team trust, inclusion

- In **overstretched systems**, **relational time** is often the **first to go**, yet strong social ties are crucial for resilience

- When teams are fractured or transient (e.g. high turnover, locum reliance, **recruitment from abroad**), a sense of *shared identity* **can weaken**

- Many pathologists work in silos or remotely, reducing informal connection and community

Belonging as Protective Factor

- Belonging is not just emotional, it signals *safety, contribution, and value*

- International and minoritised staff may feel pressure to assimilate rather than belong

- When someone's identity or values aren't reflected or welcomed, emotional distancing and cynicism can follow

Co-Regulation Buffers Stress

- **Co-regulation** (the calming power of shared presence and trust) **buffers stress**

- Without it, individuals hold **emotional weight** alone, increasing risk of withdrawal or collapse

- The **culture of "just cope"** undermines the psychological infrastructure that belonging builds

- Belonging is nervous system's signal that we are safe enough to stay present, connect, and contribute.

Experiencing Belonging

- Recognising belonging happens first in our body

- It is a **felt-sense**, not just a concept

- Belonging is not fitting in - it's being **seen and accepted** as you are

- When we feel **safe, valued** and **supported** our **nervous system responds**.

- It can happen in response to a person, group of people, a place or a sense of purpose.

Self-Reflection

- What happens in your body when you feel like you truly belong?

- When was the last time you experienced that feeling?

- What are the physical signs you notice when you don't feel you belong?

- What helps you return to a sense of ease and connection?

- How might you offer that to others in your team?

Current UK Climate

- Belonging is **under pressure**

- Recent political narratives and policies have reignited concerns around **institutional racism**, exclusion, and cultural scapegoating

- For pathologists and other NHS staff from minoritised or international backgrounds, this **compounds** the **emotional labour** of showing up in under-resourced, overstretched systems

- When **national rhetoric undermines inclusion**, even supportive departments may struggle to counteract the wider impact on identity and safety

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Global Workforce Reliance

The UK has long relied on international recruitment to fill chronic workforce shortages in healthcare.

Nearly 50% of doctors who joined the UK medical register in 2023 were internationally trained, often arriving to understaffed departments under intense pressure

50%

Source: General Medical Council (GMC), 2023

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Essential but Excluded

No longer a "temporary fix". International recruitment has **become foundational** to maintaining NHS services, particularly in pathology where high vacancy and early retirement rates persist.

> "International doctors make up a growing proportion of the NHS workforce, but too often face **hostility, discrimination** and **inadequate support**."

Source: GMC and *Medscape article* "UK at Risk of Driving Out International Doctors" (2025)

Systemic Racism

British Medical Association (BMA) survey in 2021 found:

- **Racism is widespread** within medical workforce

- 76% of respondents experienced racism in their workplace

- 71% did not report due to fear or lack of confidence in any action

- Experiences included discriminatory comments, being given fewer opportunities, more scrutiny of work, **bullying by** patients and **colleagues**, continued mispronunciation of names, social exclusion
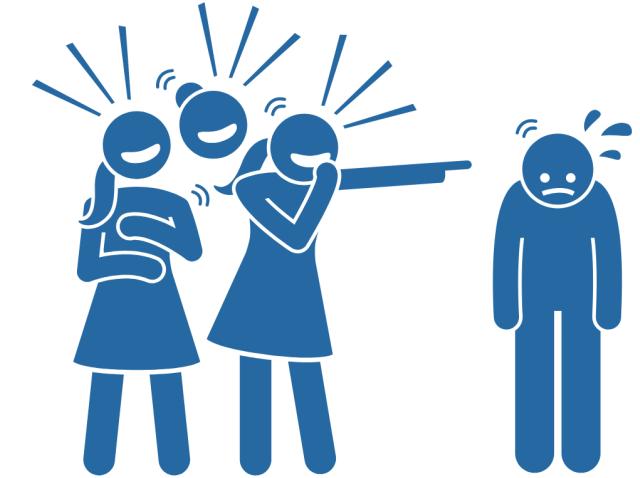
NHS Workplace Race Equality

Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority staff represent 30% NHS workforce.

A standard report in 2023 found:

"89% of NHS hospital trusts reported a higher proportion of Black and minority ethnic staff compared to white staff experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from staff in the last 12 months"

New programme announced November 2025 aimed at closing the ethnicity gap in bullying, harassment and abuse claims.

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Micro-aggression Erodes Belonging

- Racism negatively impacts on wellbeing and undermines belonging
- Direct correlation to increased stress, depression, anxiety, sleep problems and low self-esteem
- Many leave due to racial discrimination
- Feelings of humiliation, marginalisation and "not being taken seriously"
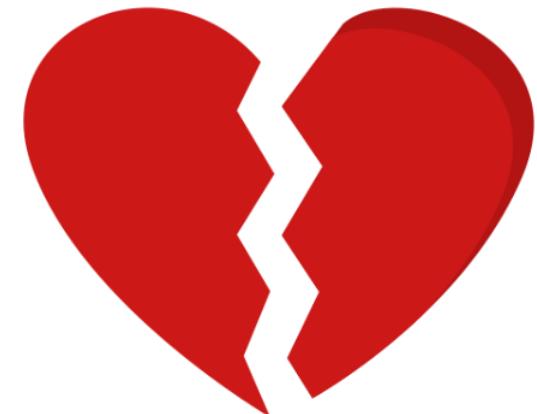
Care Restores Belonging

- Just as microaggressions chip away at trust and safety, *micro-care* **can help restore** them.

- Names spoken with care, personal questions asked with genuine interest, all voices **being invited to the table**.

- Inclusion is built in moments: seeing, hearing, and **honouring the human** in front of you.

- Especially for those navigating new systems, roles, or identities, micro-care communicates: *You matter here.*
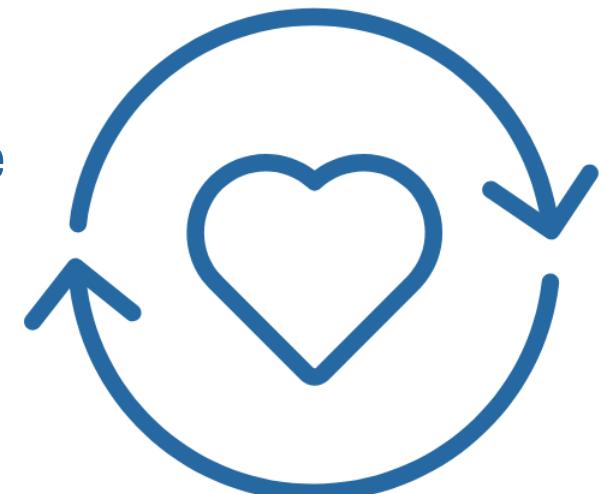
Overcoming Othering

What are you intending? What's the actual impact?
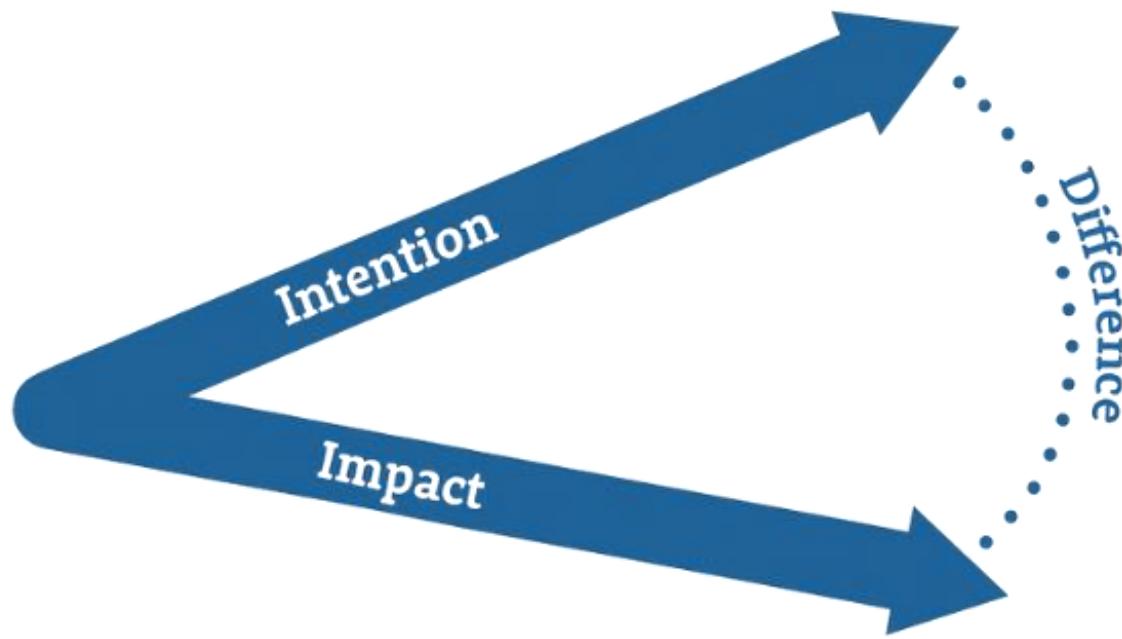
Outdated Terminology

- The labelling we use for people working abroad reflects **white privilege** and **colonial era power dynamics**

- What do we mean when we say *"expat"* versus *"migrant"* or "foreign worker"?

- Medical professionals working abroad are often called *expats*, but international professionals in the UK are often referred to as *foreign.*

- Research shows these terms are **racially and socially loaded**, reinforcing who is seen as 'us' and who is 'other'.

- Privileged professionals are more likely to be framed as *expats*, while others are labelled *migrants,* even if doing the **same work**.

Challenging Phrasing

- We **need to challenge** terms instead of glazing over and continuing to use them
- By calling a UK citizen abroad an expat, but a newcomer to the UK a foreign worker reinforces **subtle hierarchy**
- Challenging and dissecting this phrasing is important if we want more honest conversations about people living and working outside of their home countries and finding a way to **feel at home** in the UK.

Our Names Matter

- **Personal naming** is a key mechanism for **social safety** and inclusion

- Having a name ignored, anglicised or repeatedly mispronounced has been linked to respect, equality and inclusivity

- Getting someone's name wrong (or not even trying) is experienced as a status and identity threat, negatively impacting on nervous system regulation

- Nicknames when used with warmth and consent **deepen belonging**. When imposed or mocking increase isolation, confusion and loss of identity.

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Familiarity as a Lifeline

- **Moving countries** means **adapting to *everything*:** climate, language, cultural cues, work style, even humour.
- It's not just about arrival; it's a daily negotiation of belonging.
- When people who've moved to the UK seek out those with similar backgrounds or familiar language, it's not rejection, it's *regulation*. A way to catch their breath.
- These choices aren't about *not wanting* to integrate, they're about *needing* **to feel safe**, understood, and human.

Inclusion Isn't Enforcing Assimilation

- Familiar foods, shared language, cultural shorthand, these become **emotional anchor points** when everything else feels foreign.
- Inclusion isn't about enforcing assimilation, it's about building spaces where people don't have to *choose between their identity and being accepted*.

Self-Reflection

- When have you needed the familiar to survive the unfamiliar?

- Have you ever been far from home, language, or cultural reference points? What helped you cope?

- What did you long for most when you felt out of place?

- Who or what made you feel safe or seen in a new environment?

- When have you felt like an outsider, even briefly? What restored your sense of belonging?

Strength in Solidarity

- When systems feel overwhelming, it's tempting to retreat, but **shared connection** is a **source of strength**.

- Healing and change don't happen in isolation; they happen in relationship.

- **Collective care fosters resilience**: when we feel supported, seen and safe together, we can withstand more.

- Belonging isn't a solo journey, it's shaped and sustained by how we show up for each other.

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Walking Into The Storm

When a storm approaches, cattle and horses run away, exhausting themselves trying to outrun it.

But **bison turn towards the storm** and walk through it together, reducing their exposure and finding blue skies faster.

Systems can't change without us being **courageous** and walking together into the storm.

We **protect each other** when we move together.

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Beyond Burnout

- What might the blue sky of belonging look like on the other side of the storm?

- If everyone supported each other in standing up for what is needed and walking forward together, what might become possible?

- What's one small step you can take toward that future?
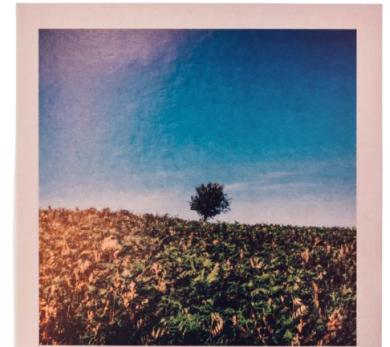
Self-Reflection

An invitation to share what belonging means for
you. Please finish the sentence:

"Belonging means…"

Advocating For Change

- **Burnout is** not just a personal issue, it's a **cultural, societal and systemic** one
- Your voice has value. Speaking up helps surface what might otherwise stay hidden
- **Small actions create ripple effects**, naming what is unsustainable is important
- **Communities of care** are created when individuals advocate for themselves *and* each other

Towards Communities of Care

- Communities of care are dependent on connection and the courage to invite others in
- Belonging is built through shared responsibility, presence, and compassion
- Standing together means showing up, speaking up and creating space for those who feel unseen or unheard
- Systemic change needs us to stand side by side
- We are the system, and we can make it more human

Thank you!