

### Context

Castleman Healthcare is a not-for-profit GP federation that supports 13 member GP practices in Dorset. Castleman's aim is to support the staff in the GP practices, and the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) they are aligned with, to meet the many challenges of delivering primary care to over 120,000 patients in Dorset. In 2022, I was engaged by the Chief Executive of Castleman Healthcare to help support and improve the wellbeing and resilience of GP practice staff across the network, supporting them to continue to deliver excellent patient care.

### The challenge

General Practice and primary care is under extreme and increasing pressure. This work pressure significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as GP practices were at the forefront of the NHS's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. General Practice staff worked tirelessly to set-up and deliver vaccine programmes, while maintaining care for their patient community. Presenting problems included:

- Practice staff were overwhelmed, stressed and exhausted: their professional resilience was low.
- Trying to keep up with the relentless pace of general practice in a post-pandemic world was becoming increasingly frustrating, eroding job satisfaction and self-confidence.
- Demand from patients increased following the COVID-19 pandemic: some staff were struggling to cope resulting in increased emotional outbursts and low mood.
- While managers had exceptional understanding, patience and empathy, they were avoiding the difficult conversations necessary to improve performance and struggling to navigate challenging relationships.

### The solutions

- **One-to-one coaching** for selected Practice Managers comprising six one-hour coaching sessions.

*"Emma has been instrumental in helping me define my professional goals and how I can achieve them. Our sessions have been informal but exceptionally constructive with Emma supporting me to seek the answers to questions myself, giving me practical tools to help me take action and helping me move forward with my life and work. Coaching has honestly been a life changer for me – thank you Emma!"*

**James Leyland, Practice Manager - Canford Heath Group Practice**

*"I met Emma at a time in my career when I was at a crossroads and after 20 years in general practice, I had decided that it was time to go. Emma helped me think about everything in a totally different way: she encouraged me to realise that some things I could change and others I couldn't, and she taught me tools to help me to navigate the challenges. With Emma's encouragement, I now approach situations with a very different mindset and I am already feeling the benefits of this at the practice. If you get the opportunity to be coached by Emma, I strongly suggest you take it!"*

**General Practice Manager supporting a team that serves over 8,000 patients**

- **Wellbeing and Resilience programme** for reception and administration teams (and all staff welcome). The programme focused on six key wellbeing topics designed to reduce stress, improve wellbeing, protect mental health and build resilience. Each 90-minute workshop was delivered virtually twice per month enabling delegates to attend according to their schedule.
  - Understand and manage stress
  - Develop a positive mindset
  - Relaxation and recovery
  - Physical wellbeing: sleep, exercise & nutrition
  - Strengthen relationships
  - Create your unique self-care plan

*"I've been practicing the Three Minute Breathing Space mindfulness meditation for a few days now. I tend to get anxious, so when these thoughts start building, I've been trying the meditation and it really helps me re-focus and feel more in control."*

**Relaxation and Recovery workshop delegate**

- **Leadership development programme** for Practice Managers, Reception Managers and Operations/Business Managers. Comprising a series of bespoke three-hour workshops delivered once a month over the course of six months. The in-person programme was designed to support leaders to explore and develop their leadership style, empower their teams and drive the productivity and performance of their Practice. Workshop topics included:

- Explore and develop your leadership style
- Leader as Coach
- Leadership wellbeing and resilience
- Empowering you and your team
- Strengthen professional relationships
- Leadership purpose and vision

*“When I noticed our Practice pharmacist was unusually stressed, I suggested she try the five-finger breathing exercise you taught us – or the “Palm of Calm” as I call it! We practiced it together the first time, then she did it a few times at her own pace. She said it was amazing – it calmed her right down and she can’t believe it worked! Can’t thank you enough Emma, that little technique is making a big difference in our Practice!”*

**Sara Curtis, Reception Manager - The Hadleigh Practice**

## The results

How did the content of the Leadership Development programme meet your expectations?

78% said ‘excellent’  
22% said ‘good’

The Leadership Development programme has :

Improved my effectiveness as a leader:

100% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

Enabled me to improve the performance of my team:

100% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

The wellbeing and resilience tools I have learned have reduced my workplace stress and/or improved my resilience:

100% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

I know how to strengthen my relationships in the workplace and how to navigate those that are challenging:

100% said ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

## Feedback from the Leadership Development programme:

“It’s a brilliant course that really makes you look at yourself.”

“It’s been really insightful and rewarding, I learned a lot. One of the best things I’ve done.”

“Very worthwhile, really interesting and I learned a lot that resonates with me.”

“The course is really informative and I learned things I didn’t realise before. It’s changed my thinking massively.”

## Fiona Cleary, Chief Executive Officer at Castleman Healthcare said:

*“Everything we do in Castleman Healthcare is designed to support our GP member practices and the PCNs to which they are aligned. Our practices continue to be challenged by the pressures and demands of work and we recognise that sometimes staff need more long-term support to help deal with the challenges they are facing. We asked Emma to design and lead a programme of support for practice staff to help them with resilience, leadership skills and improve their overall wellbeing.*

*Practice staff aren’t used to having this type of support and they weren’t sure at first, but Emma has completely changed this view. The staff that attended have been extremely positive and enthusiastic about the support Emma provided and I have heard from a number of people that Emma has changed their lives, in work and also in their own personal lives. Investing in people is essential and Emma’s way of engaging and supporting people was exceptional, she made sure they were comfortable in a safe environment and consequently they were keen to engage and benefit from these sessions. Her input has been so well received and popular that we are now investing in coaching for senior GPs in each practice.*

*Castleman owes a great deal of thanks to Emma for her coaching, support and positive influence on our practices, and our Board members, and particularly for showing us all there is a different way to deal with these challenging times and stresses - it’s not that hard to make some small changes for ourselves in order to make a big difference!”*