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Starting the conversation

We all know the early years are tough for young doctors. We also know that three junior doctors took their own lives in the past few months.

While none were employed by Sydney Local Health District, they were close colleagues of our trainees.

Which is why, at this month's Pitch innovation series at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the District announced funding for an Australian-first pilot program aimed at empowering junior doctors with the knowledge and skills to be physically and mentally healthier and better equipped to manage stress.



The BPT-OK (basic physician training) program will be incorporated into existing training for junior doctors and has been developed by Directors of Physician Training, researchers, psychiatrists, the RACP NSW Trainee Committee, personal trainers, performance coaches, and current and past basic physician trainees.

The developers have even had interest from universities keen to incorporate it into medical courses.

If successful, it may be rolled out across the state.

As part of the program, the District will provide mindfulness and resilience training by a clinical psychologist, and offer relaxation techniques and performance coaching sessions. A personal trainer will lead group exercise sessions and teach trainees how to create personalised programs, not only for themselves, but for their patients.

The program will be delivered in protected teaching time because these skills are as valuable as learning CPR.

“We do not fully understand the factors that have led to the frequency of doctor suicides,” said Dr Bethan Richards, RPA’s former Director of Physician Training.

“But we know medical culture is to stay silent on these matters and it’s time to start the conversation. We have always achieved academic excellence and now we are focusing on emotional excellence. Healthy doctors mean healthy patients, and this is good for our society.”