

## Do you know about the Supported Return to Training programme (SuppoRTT)? If not, you should!

**Dr Rifca Le Dieu** is a clinical senior lecturer and honorary consultant at Barts Health NHS Trust and SRTT lead and deputy director of the RCP's Medical Workforce Unit. **Dr Rachel Rummery** is a former national fellow of the SRTT programme.

**The conviction of Hadiza Bawa-Garba for gross medical negligence and manslaughter reverberated throughout the medical profession. The day that 6-year-old Jack Adcock died was Dr Bawa-Garba's first day on-call after a long absence from work due to maternity leave, and this has been cited as one of the factors that contributed to the events that led to his death.**

It can be extremely difficult to transition back into medical work after a period of time away, and this case brought into sharp focus the importance of supporting doctors when they return from long periods of leave. In the words of one trainee: 'I was judged at the level [as when I went off work]. I was so stressed that I was letting people down, but I could barely see from tiredness, and I couldn't remember the simplest parts of my job. I felt stupid, as a year ago I could have done these things with my eyes closed.' Dr Bawa-Garba's case demonstrated that the culture of 'just crack on' needs to change.

The government has now provided £10 million per year in a new investment to improve the return to work process. Health Education England (HEE) has used this to develop the Supported Return to Training Programme (SuppoRTT), which builds on the core principles discussed in the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges Return to Practice guidance that was revised in 2017. The purpose of the SuppoRTT programme is to 'enhance the experience of doctors returning to clinical practice enabling them to regain their confidence and previously acquired skills quickly and safely, significantly benefitting patient safety and quality of care'.

The programme provides funding to support trainees return to work, but regional dissemination of funding may vary slightly. In London and KSS, trusts can receive up to £3,000 per trainee. This money can be used to enable a period of enhanced supervision or supernumerary placements, for personal development courses, coaching, mentoring, or accelerated learning / specialty-specific refresher courses – anything the trainee, together with their educational supervisor,

agree will aid their transition to work. Each deanery has their own SuppoRTT website and application process. Trainees are eligible to apply if they have been out of programme for 3 months or longer. To date, only 12% of those eligible have applied for funds. However, the programme is not simply about money. A structured and systematic process has been developed to be administered by educational supervisors. The essential elements of this are: **a pre-absence meeting**, access to the **SuppoRTT programme** during absence, an **initial review meeting** prior to return, a supervised return period and finally a **follow-up review meeting**.

The pre-absence meeting, ideally held 3 months before leaving, is an opportunity for the trainee and supervisor to have a documented discussion about how long the trainee plans to be absent, the role they are likely to return to, any CPD they can do during their absence and the option of Keeping in Touch (KIT) days.

During absence, all trainees are strongly encouraged to enter the **SuppoRTT programme** via which they will have access to clinical and non-clinical return to training activities as well as mentorship and coaching.

Once a timeframe for return is known, ideally 8–12 weeks prior to start, the trainee attends an initial review meeting with their educational supervisor. The purpose of this meeting is to create an individualised plan of return, specifically identifying and addressing trainee concerns, learning and training needs and the need for supervised clinical sessions. (HEE has provided an example of a return to work discussion: <https://bit.ly/2RkGxL4>). This discussion is documented on the Initial Return to Training Form.

On return to work, trainees may access supervised clinical sessions bespoke to their individual needs. Indeed, for any trainee who has been absent for more than 6 months, it is actively recommended that they should undertake these sessions. These sessions may involve the trainee being supernumerary, having focused learning activities or direct observation of clinical practice. During this period, it is not expected that the trainee will undertake out-of-hours work unless adequate

supervision is available.

Towards the end of the supervised period, the educational supervisor and trainee meet again for the follow-up review meeting, for a discussion of the trainee's progress, any assessments are reviewed and further learning needs are established. If both are satisfied with the progress made, then the trainee can be signed off and return to normal duties.

To aid the implementation of this programme, HEE has also provided funding for SuppoRTT champions. Their role is to advertise the SuppoRTT programme to both trainees and supervisors, provide advice on how to access resources and relevant guidance, and to oversee the return to work process.

Throughout the return to work process, the trainee's first point of contact remains their educational supervisor or training programme director. However, if additional guidance and support is required trainees, educators and other staff can contact their local SuppoRTT champion and the SuppoRTT team based within the deanery.

This process may seem like a lot more paperwork, but don't get hung up on the form-filling – the face-to-face conversations that we will have with our trainees about returning to work can make a real difference to the wellbeing of our workforce and the safety of our patients.

### What to do next

#### For everyone

- > Visit your local HEE office website, details of which can be found at: [www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/supporting-doctors-returning-training-after-time-out](http://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/supporting-doctors-returning-training-after-time-out)
- > Find the SuppoRTT champion at your trust for further advice on the programme

#### For consultants who supervise trainees

- > Watch the 5 minute video demonstrating how to have a return to work conversation with a trainee: <https://bit.ly/2RkGxL4>

#### For trainees

- > Visit <https://mysupportt.com>

#### For NHS HR / managers

- > Ensure your trust has a SuppoRTT champion and that they have the resources they need to fulfil the role: [www.lpmde.ac.uk/professional-development/inductreturnretain/rtp/supportt-champions-1](http://www.lpmde.ac.uk/professional-development/inductreturnretain/rtp/supportt-champions-1) ■