

Re-wiring the law

Rachel Spearing introduces the UK's first Wellness for Law Forum

March saw the launch of a new initiative to support ongoing work to improve health and wellbeing at the Bar. The Wellness for Law Forum is a not-for-profit organisation aiming to share the knowledge of clinicians, academics and practitioners in a yearly international forum, kindly sponsored and hosted for its first event by the Honourable Society of Inner Temple on 29 and 30 June 2017.

Mirroring the successful Australian initiative developed by Professor Rachael Field, our first UK forum is assisted by an organising board with two international members, Michael Appleby and Judy Bourke (Sydney's College of Law), alongside myself and Professor Cheryl Thomas QC (University College London). It is hoped that greater international collaboration will support future forums to share global clinical research and practical application to assist education and continuing development for our profession.

The theme is 'Re-wiring the Law', inspired by the burgeoning developments of science and human performance. Research suggests that individuals can change long-held negative patterns of thinking and behaviour, thus improving wellbeing. Previous beliefs that our traits and characteristics are somehow fixed are no longer true. This is pertinent given the recent evidence of the challenges facing the profession within the Wellbeing at the Bar research, which highlighted that one in three barristers found it difficult to control or stop worrying, two in three barristers felt that showing signs of stress is a weakness, and one in six felt low in spirits most of the time.



The Wellness for Law Forum is helping to drive the wellbeing agenda forward and to provide guidance and leadership in this important area.

Ours is a demanding profession. The better equipped we are to meet the challenges we face, the more we will achieve, not only for ourselves but for our clients and for the public interest which we serve.

Members of the Bar with an interest in wellbeing, and those who might be thinking about how this has an impact on their own lives, should consider attending this event.

Andrew Langdon QC, Chairman of the Bar

Work to address the issues faced and support those in crisis is now firmly on the agenda. Leadership in all areas have responded to those statistics with positive strategies to normalise and educate the profession, and those considering joining the Bar, about the risks, management and recovery strategies available.

We all recognise the challenging landscape of our environment, yet psychological wellbeing within the profession is rarely spoken about and many of us struggle at times during our professional career. Michael Mansfield QC will host a plenary discussion



www.wellbeingatthebar.org.uk



The Inner Temple is proud to be sponsoring and hosting the first UK Wellness for Law Forum in June. This important event reaffirms the Inn's commitment to supporting, educating and assisting our members' in developing not only their legal skills, but also in acquiring vital tools for maintaining their physical and mental health.

Life at the Bar is undoubtedly challenging. We must continue to work together to ensure a fluid and continuing dialogue about mental health and how best to understand, support and resolve issues for the benefit of the profession and the public alike.

David Pittaway QC, Treasurer of The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple

regarding these challenges and his work to combat the risks and responses to suicide. The forum seeks to explain some of these issues, and will hear from experts in the fields of academia, medicine, clinical research and professional human development. But most importantly it will be supported by our leadership, with the Chairman of the Bar opening the Forum, alongside delegates including Treasurers of the Inns, specialist Bar association leaders, clerks, practice managers, barristers and students.

Keynote presentations and workshops will present the science, philosophy and application of skills to help us better understand stress, performance, decision-making and health. Previously unexplored within legal education and somewhat neglected in continuing professional development, many suggest this kind of insight is vital to help navigate what can be a challenging landscape.

A musical celebration and evensong at the Temple Church will launch the forum on 29 June, followed by a welcome reception and dinner for delegates with the Treasurer of the Inn. The forum sessions will be held on 30 June, preceded by early morning exercise, yoga and mindfulness activities held in the garden.

More information can be found on wellnessforlawuk.org, with links to join the network and register for the forum. Please do encourage all those with interest to attend. ●



Contributor Rachel Spearing, Co-Founder of Wellbeing at the Bar and Convener of the Wellness for Law UK Forum. *Counsel* will be reporting from the forum