

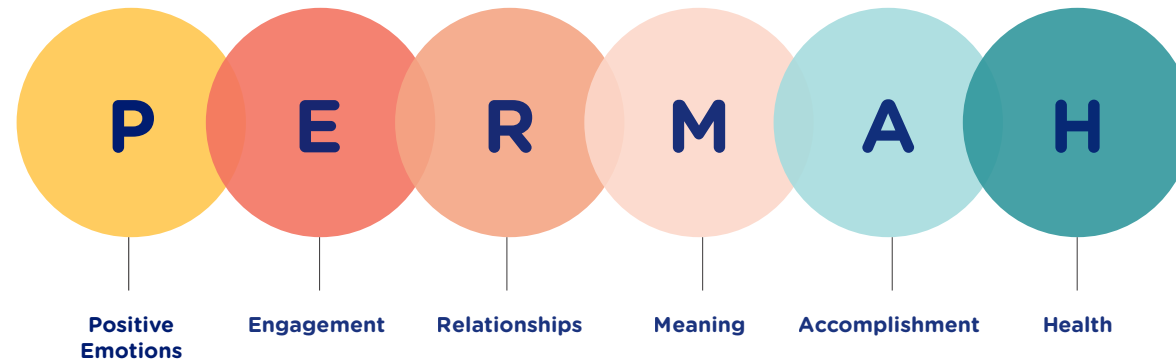
Boosting Engagement to Build Resilience in Dentistry

Part of The Well-being Toolkit for Dental Professionals

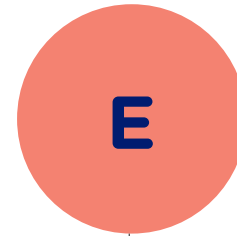
In collaboration with Dr Mahrukh Khwaja,
Dentist and Positive Psychologist



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Dr Martin Seligman’s PERMA model explores five pillars for flourishing and thriving at work and beyond.¹ It suggests that well-being is cultivated by the presence of a rich diet of positive emotions, feeling engaged, connected through positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment. Since 2012, a further component has been added to incorporate health factors, known as the PERMA-H model.²



Engagement

Boosting engagement to build resilience in dentistry

Long hours, a heavy workload and demanding patients are challenges that you might face in dentistry. You may relish these challenges but if they become overwhelming, they can lead to stress and burnout.^{3,4} This article discusses how the PERMA-H model can be used as a strategy to help build resilience and combat stress and burnout in dentistry, with expert tips from Dr Mahrukh Khwaja: dentist, positive psychologist and author of the book 'Resilience and well-being for Dental Professionals'. It focuses on the second component, 'engagement'.



Flow is a state of effortless enjoyment, and is a pathway to engagement

Flow occurs when you become fully immersed in an experience — when you are “in the zone”. It is common when you are doing enjoyable activities or those that require your full attention.^{5,6} Outlined below are certain conditions that must be met to achieve flow⁵.

Finding flow in your work and at home comes with many potential benefits. Living in the moment and engaging fully with a current task or activity promotes a range of positive emotion, from joy and happiness to satisfaction and interest, all of which contribute to your overall well-being.^{1,7}

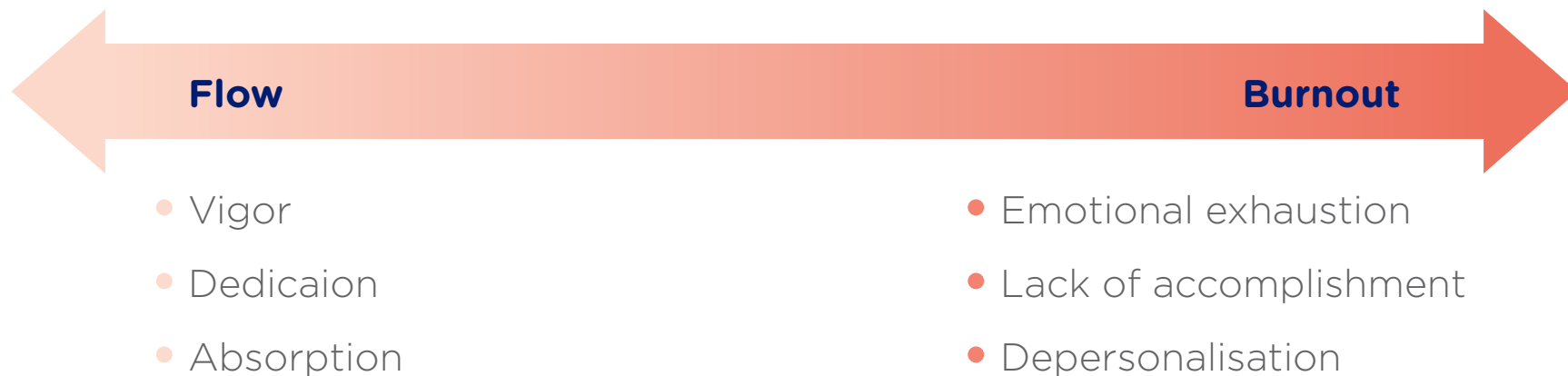
<p>1</p> <p>Clear, measurable goals</p> 	<p>2</p> <p>Immediate feedback</p> 	<p>3</p> <p>A sense of control</p> 	<p>4</p> <p>A sense of self-confidence</p> 	<p>5</p> <p>An optimal level of challenge</p> 
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Burnout and flow lie at opposite ends of the spectrum^{8,9}

Whilst flow relies on the perfect combination of vigor, dedication and absorption, burnout occurs when these factors are out of balance:⁹

High levels of engagement therefore correlate inevitably with less work-related burnout. Dentists who are highly work-engaged are more committed and satisfied with their jobs, have increased mental and psychosomatic health, demonstrate proactive behaviour and learning motivation and experience lower job turnover.³ Burnout, meanwhile, leads to more errors and safety incidents.^{3,10} Engagement is therefore not only important to the well-being and resilience of physicians, but also the safety of patients.¹⁰





Achieving flow at work

It might not be immediately apparent how to bring about a state of flow during your working day, but there are several scenarios within dentistry that present opportunities. Complicated procedures that require uninterrupted attention as well as engaging fully with individual patient's experiences, beyond physical symptoms and examinations, can enhance flow.^{4,5} Exploring new, efficient approaches to problems and paying close attention to adding value to a job can turn a mundane activity into a meaningful and enjoyable one.⁵ Another powerful way to achieve flow is by identifying and honing in on your character strengths.^{2,11}





Character strengths: the precursor of flow

Personal character strengths are known to influence psychological well-being and positive emotions whilst counteracting negative feelings.¹¹ Acknowledging your character strengths and using them to overcome challenges by deploying them in new ways stimulates professional satisfaction and ultimately helps you achieve flow throughout your working day.^{2,11} You can use the VIA survey at the end of this article to take the first steps in identifying and implementing your strengths.





DR MAHRUKH
KHWAJA

Bringing Our Strengths to Dentistry

Understanding and applying your strengths in novel and engaging ways, may help invite greater meaning, connection to others and get you to 'flow' states. The table to the right shows how you can activate your key strengths at work, when with patients or team members, as well as outside the clinic.

Character Strength	Examples of how to activate your key strengths
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider new ways you can help support your team. This may involve asking your team members what they need, offering to mentor a colleague or completing a task together Reflect on how the well-being of team members could be improved. Organise team well-being training and consider becoming a Mental Health First Aider Organise events outside the clinic to better understand and connect with each other away from the pressures of Dentistry e.g. team bonding days, dinners, theatre Work on a joint vision board to visually illustrate the teams goals for the upcoming year
Gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before starting a team meeting, ask each team member to share one thing, big or small, that they are grateful for today Consider three tough moments in dentistry and three good things they led to Share your gratitude with a colleague Have a gratitude board at work for written gratitude notes acknowledging wins, patient cards and team 'thank yous' to specific team members



Kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do a small act of kindness at work today. This could be making a cup of tea for a work colleague, bringing treats to a team meeting or offering to do someone's least favourite task at work• Remember birthdays• Organise a special occasion collection• Practise the Loving-Kindness Meditation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MY83woD3mlM&t=3s)• Offer yourself kindness by asking yourself daily, what small thing can I do that will bring me joy today
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practise 'strengths-spotting' by focusing on seeing and appreciating the strengths of your team members• Consider different ways you can improve your leadership style. Ask your team for their input• Lead an activity, encouraging team members who rarely share opinions to share their thoughts
Love of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrange a 'lunch and learn', sharing knowledge on a topic with your dental peers• Begin a new course• Take breaks in your day to learn something new



DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

Working Out Your Strengths Sweet Spot

Overusing our strengths can lead to negative well-being impacts, such as overworking. The key is to find our optimal strengths sweet spot: that is the right combination of strengths, the right amount and in the right situation. This can take some practice and mindful attention to achieve. Consider the below reflection prompts to help to discover what this may look like for you.

1

Consider a situation where you overused your key strengths. What were the impacts on your well-being or others?

2

Are there situations where you have underused your strengths? How did this impact you and others?

3

Reflect on a recent stressor at work. Which strengths were you underusing and which were you overusing?



Engagement and resilience at home

Achieving engagement in your personal life is equally important as it too promotes well-being, productivity, happiness and motivation.^{6,7} Tips for achieving flow at home:

1

Activities

Find time for activities with clear goals that fully engage you, for example teaching, learning an instrument, cooking, painting, drawing, gardening or physical activities such as running, swimming or playing sport^{5,6}



2

Mindfulness

Practise mindfulness to increase your connection and engagement with others and your surroundings — ignoring distractions by living in the moment means you're more likely to achieve flow^{12,13}



3

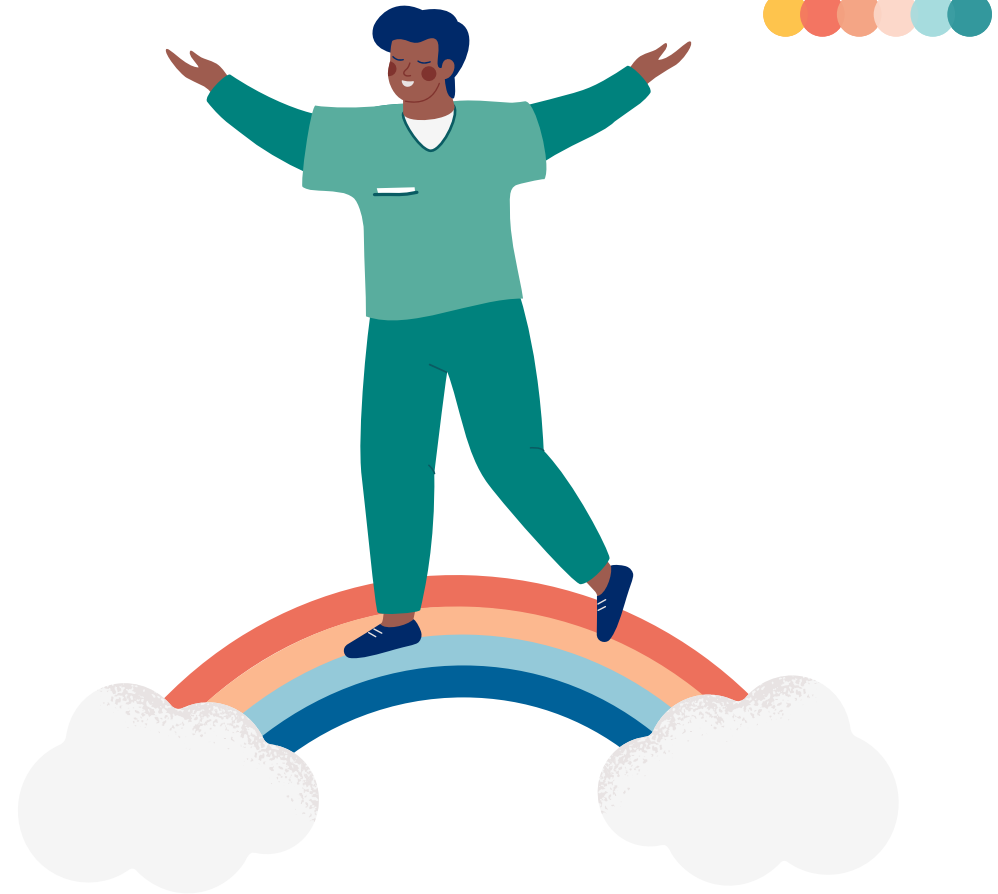
Little achievements

Approach typically mundane jobs with this new mindset — focus on the small details of the task to prevent distraction whilst allowing yourself to be satisfied by little achievements such as hanging the washing out⁵



E — Engagement

To start your journey of discovering your strengths, and honing them at work, try Dr Khwaja's exercise on the following pages. You can also take the VIA character strengths survey by following the link below in the Further Reading list.



Further reading

A theory of well-being

<https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/>

VIA character strengths survey

<https://www.viacharacter.org/>

Dr Khwaja's 'Strengths' meditation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY83woD3mIM>

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5. Csikszentmihalyi M. Finding flow: the psychology of engagement with everyday life. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/200026151_Finding_Flow_The_Psychology_of_Engagement_With_Everyday_Life. Accessed: June 2022.
6. Khwaja M. BDJ in practice. 2020; 33(3): 26-7. 7. Seligman M et al. Oxford Review of Education. 2009; 35(3): 293-311.
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The Well-being Toolkit for Dental Professionals:

part 2 of 6 of a Unilever mini-series on how to flourish, thrive and avoid burnout in dentistry

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DR MAHRUKH KHWAJA

ACTIVITY

Doubling Down on Strengths

Our strengths are positive aspects of our personality that allow us to bring our authentic self to our every-day lives.

Research is growing in this area amongst medical professionals, spotlighting that understanding and using our strengths could boost engagement at work, foster meaning and greater mental well-being^{1,2}. Try these journaling prompts to help you discover your greatest qualities and start using your strengths in dentistry and at home, to build your most fulfilled life.

1. Hausler Melanie, Strecker Cornelia, Huber Alexandra, Brenner Mirjam, Høge Thomas, Höfer Stefan (2017). Associations between the Application of Signature Character Strengths, Health and Well-being of Health Professionals. *Frontiers in Psychology* VOLUME 8
2. Huber Alexandra, Strecker Cornelia, Kachel Timo, Høge Thomas, Höfer Stefan (2020). Character Strengths Profiles in Medical Professionals and Their Impact on Well-Being. *Frontiers in Psychology* VOLUME 11 3. The VIA Classification of 24 character strengths - Via Institute on Character - www.viacharacter.org



E — Engagement

ACTIVITY

Doubling Down on Strengths

All of us possess the 24 character strengths, to varying degrees, from the VIA strengths table. This maps out our unique strengths profile. Use the VIA strengths table on the next page to consider which top 5 strengths resonate with you the most. List these below:






Reflect on how you are currently using your top strengths when with patients, with your team members and at home. From the above strengths listed, how do these strengths energise you, bring joy or a state of 'flow'?

How can you bring your strengths to working with patients and interacting with your team in different ways in your week? If love of learning is a top strength for you, you could identify topics you can share with colleagues, start a new course or take learning breaks in your day.

The VIA Classification of 24 Character Strengths



Adapted from <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>

WISDOM	Creativity Showing originality, adaptability and ingenuity	Curiosity Openness to new ideas and keenness to explore	Judgment Open-mindedness and the ability to think critically	Love of Learning Mastering new skills and gathering knowledge	Perspective Providing wise counsel and taking a big-picture view
COURAGE	Bravery Acting with conviction in the face of challenges despite doubts or fears	Perseverance Showing tenacity in achieving goals despite obstacles, discouragements, or disappointments	Honesty Acting with authenticity and integrity	Zest Approaching life with vitality, enthusiasm and energy	
HUMANITY	Love Experiencing and valuing close, loving relationships with others	Kindness Showing generosity, compassion and altruism			Social Intelligence Understanding the motives and feelings of self and others
JUSTICE	Teamwork Demonstrating loyalty and social responsibility; collaborating with others to achieve a goal			Fairness Treating everyone equally and fairly, without bias	Leadership Organising and encouraging others to get things done and achieve a shared vision.
TEMPERANCE		Forgiveness Acceptance of others' shortcomings and being willing to give people a second chance	Humility Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves, without seeking attention or recognition	Prudence Being careful and cautious; not taking unnecessary risks	Self-Regulation Showing discipline and self-control
TRANSCENDENCE	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence Feeling awe and wonder about the world and the skill of others	Gratitude Feeling blessed and expressing thanks	Hope Optimism for the future	Humour Showing playfulness and lightheartedness	Spirituality Feeling a sense of purpose and meaning in life and acknowledging your place in the universe



E — Engagement

ACTIVITY

Doubling Down on Strengths

We can use our strengths to help us during clinical challenges or difficulties, both at work and at home. Reflect on a challenge and how you used your strength to help you take positive steps forward.

Are there unexplored strengths that you would like to further develop?

Consider a goal that you could set that could encourage activating your strengths further at work or in your personal life. What small steps can you take to move forward?
