

Jay first felt the strain of his profession on his wellbeing back in 2007, just over a year after qualifying as a solicitor. Since then, he's experienced serious episodes of mental health issues and stress, as a direct result of his work.

It started off with the workload becoming a real strain on my wellbeing, with very little work-life balance. Things took a turn for the worse when I had a traumatic experience involving a client, who should have been flagged as at-risk. She had been turned away from another practice for dangerous behaviour, but the information never got passed on. In one meeting, she self-harmed with a sharp object. I was in shock and genuinely felt quite vulnerable, especially as my wife was pregnant with our first child. Not long after the incident, I handed in my notice to work at a firm nearer to home.

A heavy burden

Over the last three years, my mental health spiralled downwards again, as a result of work. I was involved in an incredibly stressful case that stretched on and on, with 38 hearings over three years. The case was known within the firm as a poisoned chalice, with Partners joking about not wanting to go near it. Yet I was struggling under the burden of representing the case with no support.



Things escalated when the ex-husband of my client began to make threats, and took out complaint after complaint against me. There were times I couldn't get out of bed to go to work. I couldn't sleep, my wife saw me turn from a gregarious individual to a withdrawn shell of myself. I repeatedly asked for help, but wasn't offered anything. I felt completely isolated.

In the end I had to step away from the profession for my own wellbeing. I left the firm and took a sabbatical for six months, mobilising for the

RAF. During my time there I noticed what impressive support the RAF had in place for personnel experiencing mental health difficulties, from counselling to mentoring. It was enlightening to see this, model of good practice.

A positive new work culture

I've now been with a new firm for the last six months, where I can already see such a contrast in the culture. They are much more supportive, with an emphasis on checking in on each other, especially during these challenging times with the pandemic. There's a much more open dialogue around wellbeing, and we're offered things like online yoga and encouraged to take time for ourselves.

Ultimately, I feel like my mental health would not have been affected in this way if there had been systems in place to support practitioners during challenging cases. The firm should have had a collaborative approach, with Partners pulling together and making decisions based not on earning fees, but on protecting staff. As family practitioners, we deal with highly emotional individuals, some of whom are very volatile, yet there isn't the emotional support to manage this.

I hope the industry can move forwards and learn to better support its people. Organisations like Resolution are playing a part in changing the discourse. It's so important, especially for the sake of newer practitioners joining the industry.

Jay, Family Law Partner, Wiltshire

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