

CASE STUDY

How Mentoring Is Supporting Doctors Across NHS Highland



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Working in healthcare is rewarding, but it can also be demanding and isolating. Doctors in NHS Highland work across large geographical areas, often under pressure and at times facing significant career transitions or personal challenges. While appraisal and supervision systems are important, they do not always provide space to talk openly about wellbeing, confidence, career direction or work-life balance.

National evidence has shown rising levels of stress and burnout among doctors since the pandemic. Locally, it was clear that doctors needed access to a safe, confidential space to reflect with a trained peer.

THE CHALLENGE ON THE GROUND

Establishing a mentoring service required more than goodwill. Mentors needed training and support. Doctors needed to be matched appropriately. Enquiries had to be managed sensitively and confidentially. Without dedicated leadership and administrative time, the scheme would not have been sustainable. Demonstrating impact also required careful consideration, as mentoring conversations are, by design, private.

HOW WE RESPONDED

With £30,000 of funding from the Charity, a two-year pilot of the NHS Highland Doctors Mentoring Scheme was launched in May 2023.

The funding enabled:

- Protected time for two clinical leads
- Dedicated administrative support
- Professional mentor training
- Collection of anonymised participant feedback

The scheme was open to all doctors, at any career stage. Mentoring is confidential and separate from appraisal or performance processes. Sessions may be one-off or short-term, depending on need. The Egan mentoring approach supported doctors to clarify challenges, explore options and identify practical next steps.

Charitable funding ensured the service was structured, equitable and properly supported.

THE CHANGE WE ACHIEVED

During the pilot, **80 doctors** accessed mentoring support, many at pivotal points in their careers. **26 mentors** were trained, strengthening skills across the organisation. Feedback highlighted improvements in confidence, clarity and professional sustainability.

One participant shared how mentoring helped them stay in medicine:

“Mentoring helped me continue with, and finish, my training and without it, I don’t think this would have been possible.”



Others spoke about the value of having time and space to reflect:

“I can’t explain how the space provided during a mentoring session, and the process, helps you identify where the problems are and come up with solutions, in a really personalised way. It’s a fascinating process to be part of, but really what is most important is how much of a difference it makes in supporting you in your career.”



For doctors stepping into senior roles, mentoring helped them adjust and regain balance:

“The mentoring I received has helped me prioritise what is important to me and help me find a way to continue to make my career work for me.”



THE JOURNEY AHEAD

The mentoring scheme was always designed as a pilot to test whether a structured, confidential mentoring service could make a meaningful difference and we are grateful to the Charity donors and supporters who made it possible.

In response to clear demand, strong engagement and positive feedback, NHS Highland has committed to continuing funding the mentoring service beyond the Charity grant period, with protected leadership time now built into ongoing support.