



## Council group take counsel

Mental health hasn't just been raised as an issue through Gazette letters – the Partnership Council's Partner Group has also taken an interest.

"We were looking at how we support Partners with stress as well as their managers and colleagues," says Chris Coburn, Peter Jones's Councillor and Partner Group Chair. "That evolved into a wider discussion on mental health." The group invited Anne Buckley and Nick Davison (Heads of Partner Support and Partnership Health Services, respectively) to update it on our business's approach.

That session took almost double the time allocated, such was the

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interest. "There's no simple solution, but just recognising mental health as an issue is important," says Chris.

Other Partner Group members agree. Waitrose's Claire Barry (pictured) says of Anne and Nick's presentation: "The care we put into supporting Partners struggling with life – especially mental health issues – impressed me. There's still a long way to go to get Partners and society to understand it, but we're off to a good start." John Lewis's Ange Kerr adds: "I was particularly interested as I had mental health 'First Aid' training which helped me as a line manager."

Chris praises Jeff Toogood for the Gazette letter he wrote in 2014, which led to this themed issue (*Comment, p17*). "It was brilliant; I was impressed he was brave enough to talk about the effect it had had on him," he says.



PHOTOS: JEFF HOPKINS; FEATHERS INC / GETTY IMAGES; JAMES MACKENZIE

## Question: Is social media contributing to mental health issues among the younger generation?

**DALIA DAWOOD** – GAZETTE REPORTER AND SOCIAL MEDIA USER

It's not easy being twentysomething. There's a lot of pressure on us to be successful after university and if, like many students today, you're propelled into a shaky economic world where competition for jobs is fierce, you're likely to be left feeling stressed.

Lucky, then, that we're part of a generation that can turn to virtual spaces like social media to unwind. Or is it? A study by the Office for National Statistics shows that one in five 16–24-year-olds suffers psychological problems, while the government's Health and Social Care Information Centre shows that 20–29-year-olds are referred for therapy more than any other age group.

Is it a coincidence that this is the same 'Facebook generation' that uses social media most, or could it suggest that all the likes, shares and posts can make us feel inferior? There's a natural tendency to compare your success against others', especially as it's instantly accessible online – your self esteem can be reaffirmed by a retweet or squashed at the sight of a friend's 'perfect' selfie. The irony is, while social media connects people virtually, it can make younger people feel isolated because of a belief that they need to present a perfect image to others (*Media Watch, p24*). As someone who uses social media daily, I've seen this happen and can admit it's triggered similar feelings in me at times.

There's no denying it has powerful effects on mental health, but not always in a bad way. In fact, an article in *The Guardian* last week said more people than ever are talking about mental health online, with 47% aged 21 and under saying they find it easier than talking face-to-face.

YouTube vloggers (video bloggers) are sharing their personal experiences to audiences of thousands and Tumblr has communities of support, while mental health charities have seen the benefits of using social media to raise awareness, including SANE (*G interview, p12*). All of them share a similar message: it's okay to admit something's wrong and to speak about your struggles – and that gets a 'like' from me.



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