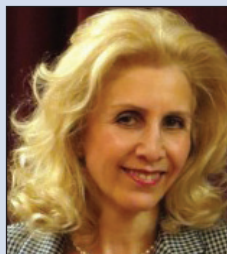


REVIEW PAPER

ISMA UK Conference: GROWTH 2017

Friday 16 June 2017



Our annual conference GROWTH 2017 took place in a packed room at the Royal Over-Seas League, London on Friday 16 June.

People travelled from around the world to hear the latest updates about stress, resilience and wellbeing. In the audience, we had representation from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and Occupational Health, as well as from HR managers, health promotion advisers and many mental health charities.

We were delighted that Clare Forshaw, Head of the Centre for Health at the HSE, opened the conference, while nutritionist Patrick Holford and mental health campaigner Jonny Benjamin MBE delivered keynote addresses during the morning.

We were also delighted to welcome our past ISMA President, Professor Lennart Levi from Sweden.

The main event in the afternoon took the form of 'Meet the Experts' business sessions delivered by some of the leading business consultants in the country, including Chris Day, Michael Dodd, Professor Stephen Palmer, Nathan Littleton, Warren Knight and Charlie Lawson.

It was indeed a very successful day – full of energy, motivation and great networking for all delegates. I look forward to GROWTH 2018 which will take place on Wednesday 9 November 2018. Put it in your diary now.

Carole Spiers, FISMA, MIHPE, Chair, ISMA UK

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¹ International Stress Management Association
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Funding

None declared

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest in respect to their authorship or the publication of this paper.

Acknowledgments

Conference speakers and ISMA UK

BRUCE HOVERD, FISMA

'I always enjoy attending events when they exceed my expectations. This was very true of the recent ISMA conference.

One of the highlights for me was Patrick Holford, who gave us so much to think about in such a short time. He spoke openly, and from a sound and practical knowledge base, about the clear relationship between healthy living and managing, reducing or preventing a stressed state. The time to work in small groups and easily network was valuable.

I met some great people who I know I will follow up with [in several cases I already have progressed our link]. The small group sessions also served as a great reminder to move, in my work, from thinking into taking action.

The most memorable moments of the day came from the refreshingly honest life stories of Jonny Benjamin. Thank you Jonny for your openness, sincerity and inspiring words about mental health. The ISMA conference improves each year... roll on 2018.

Thanks again to Carole and Co.'

CLARE FORSHAW, HEAD OF CENTRE FOR HEALTH, HSE'S HEALTH & SAFETY LABORATORY

'With the profile of improving mental health becoming higher on many agendas across Government, its departments, industry and third sector organisations, ISMA has an even larger responsibility and opportunity to influence all stakeholders with an evidence-based management approach. The conference this year certainly set



the tone for this with a variety of speakers providing evidence-based perspectives on stress prevention strategies, allowing delegates to understand the case for intervention and management. There were a range of opportunities to interact with the speakers and engage with like-minded delegates in order to enable peer support and a full and frank exchange of ideas.

Personally, for me, I found hearing from Jonny Benjamin about his mental health journey and his perspective and reflections on all he had experienced extremely moving and inspiring. For me this highlighted the need to be more open and supportive, particularly recognising the pressures and expectations placed on our young people today, but that sometimes we can all be responsible for just being that open ear and saying: "It's all going to be OK".

DR LYNDA SHAW CPSYCHOL, ISMA TRUSTEE

'In my world of neuroscience and psychology I am acutely aware how stress can create havoc for the individual, teams and companies as a whole. It was with great delight, therefore, that I went along to my first ISMA conference.

The day was packed with valuable and practical information for everyone concerned with stress management and general well-being. Speakers, organisers and the audience were all a supportive, friendly bunch of like-minded people and I will definitely be going to the next ISMA conference. It's a must for all who want to tackle stress and the knock-on negative effects it can have on health, productivity at work, and family life.

Thank you. Carole and team, you are doing a magnificent job.'

TRACY PIKE, CEO, CARMARTHENSHIRE YOUTH & CHILDREN'S ASSOCIATION (CYCA)

'I always travel from Wales to attend the ISMA conference as I gain so much by meeting like-minded delegates! As a 3rd sector CEO my passion is supporting children and their families, guiding them to manage stress and help develop resilience.

For me, Jonny Benjamin was inspirational, breaking down the myths about self-harm and suicidal ideation in young people and how it can touch any family. Jonny consequently evoked a debate around mental distress with young people and lack of services, as most do not meet the threshold for CAMHS. This will be a topic for 2018 which hopefully will bring together other health professionals too. All speakers brought something different - and current too.

Thank you, Carole, for all your hard work and determination

to promote ISMA services: it is such an important organisation that highlights the work of stress practitioners.'

KATHLEEN DALY, CHILDLINE SUPERVISOR, NSPCC

'On arrival, guests were greeted with a warm welcome, each table had a buddy allocated to them. This helped facilitate conversation and answered any questions regarding the conference. I found this to be extremely helpful. Great to have a variety of speakers encompassing different aspects of mental health.

The talks gave a holistic approach into looking at all aspects of mental health.

Patrick Holford gave a very informative talk on nutrition and understanding blood sugar dips and why we end up constantly tired. It gave me a greater insight and understanding of the "mechanics of stress", and how we can help ourselves by introducing a blend of dietary changes, to heal our mind and body, resulting in lower stress levels and improved wellbeing. Patrick was also involved in research to show how multivitamins can increase children's IQ scores. The talk gave an opportunity for one to think about how food impacts on the brain which can impact on work performance and emotional wellbeing.

The talk on Cognitive Neuroscience by Dr Lynda Shaw involved thinking about how we can exacerbate stressful situations with the language we use, also gain an understanding around serotonin melatonin and how we can level out these functions and understand their work. Lynda has written a wonderful book for children around bullying "Beat the Bullies Use Your Brain" – this is very informative and gives children a greater understanding of how the brain works and empowers the child to have some control over their emotions.

The speaker Jonny Benjamin shared his own very moving personal story about living with mental illness as young boy. Jonny takes you through his journey sharing his struggles with attempted suicides. His work, which involves campaigning to get mental health onto the school curriculum, takes him around the world giving talks on promoting mental health awareness so people are more informed.

We had an opportunity to attend various workshops and meet other professionals. I attended Deep Raja Dhir's talk on "Stress In the Ethnic Community". This helped me to think about the problems ethnic communities in Britain face, and the barriers that prevent them speaking out. Listening to the talks enables one to think about how one can take some responsibility for our own mental health and wellbeing.

Jeremy Nicholas, the MC for the day, ensured the day ran smoothly, with lots of added humour.

I am sorry I have not mentioned all the wonderful speakers. I have taken so much away with me from this conference. It was a truly inspirational day and I would highly recommend it. Thank you.'

CHRIS CLARK, ISMA TRUSTEE, CEO, MAKE PUBLIC

'Many commentators have covered the events of the day in detail, and indeed from a more experienced perspective than I could muster, so my thoughts of the day are angled more at the message and the audience. "Speak Up and Speak Out About Stress" is the ISMA message in response to findings that stress awareness in British organisations has not really moved over the last five years, though the subject is rising up the agenda for the caring organisations: the Health and Safety Executive is on record as saying: "No more surveys – we want action!"

So how did ISMA do? Attendee numbers were noticeably up from last year as everyone was very aware (a larger room is planned for 2018), as was the reach of the conference to the most diverse audience of practitioners and charities since the 2015 re-launch.

Considerable note-taking took place, very insightful questions were asked, and the workshops were well-attended (Professor Stephen Palmer's was heavily over-subscribed). Jonny Benjamin MBE, who gave a speech no-one present will forget in a hurry, was sufficiently impressed to accept Carole's invitation to be a patron. At the end of the day the AGM session was remarkably well attended, giving the observer the strong impression of a timely conference, relevant presentations, and a very engaged audience who will take the learnings into their future projects.

Onwards now to INSAD and the 2018 Conference which will, without question, be a step up from this year's success.'



**PROFESSOR LENNART LEVI, MD,
PHD, PSYCHOSOCIAL MEDICINE
KAROLINSKA INSTITUTET,
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN
PAST PRESIDENT ISMA
INTERNATIONAL**

'For me, the recent ISMA UK meeting was inspiring and rewarding, offering an extraordinary scope of complementary contributions, delivered by first-class speakers, and masterfully

coordinated by Carole Spiers. It demonstrates ISMA's enormous current and future challenge to manage and prevent a phenomenon that contributes to around half of all lost working days in Europe.

Allow me, as an old-timer, to propose a set of six interrelated strategies for effective stress management and prevention.

First, the strategy of "Health in all policies", replacing the old-fashioned "silo approach" of acting exclusively through the health system.

Second, the strategy of "Critical ethical thinking", which leads us to demand both a reliable evidence base and show ethical considerations, before undertaking any corrective actions.

Third, the strategy of "Sustainability", replacing many prevalent, over-simplified, short-term quick-fix approaches.

Fourth, the strategy of "Bridging the Science-Policy and Policy-Implementation Gaps", badly needed because countless declarations, decisions and guidelines are published and endorsed – but not efficiently implemented, and rarely evaluated.

Fifth, the strategy of "Combining top-down and bottom-up" approaches, involving all relevant stakeholders and populations concerned.

And sixth, the strategy of "Reducing health inequities", because health is a fundamental human right.

This would help materialise the current WHO Health 2020 Policy Framework for Europe, but also, and even more important, the new UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals Framework.'

DR LAURA GINESI, FISMA, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

'It's always invigorating to meet others who share a passion for trying to reduce stress and improve well-being. All of the presentations at conference provided new food for thought. I'd been unable to attend last year so it was good to catch up with some old friends and meet some new people. The highlight of my day was the opportunity to hear and later speak to Jonny Benjamin, whose honest and moving account of lived experience of mental health problems provided a rare level of insight.

Having worked with young adults for all of my career, the enthusiasm amongst delegates for early, evidence-based stress prevention and intervention in schools, colleges and universities was really affirming. Often people think that adolescence and early adulthood is a happy period in people's lives.

The reality is often very different these days. The combined effects of physiological remodelling of the brain's reward system, low resistance to peer pressure – including that from social media

– along with the challenges of examinations, forming your identity, and early sexual and romantic relationships – is a powerful cocktail.

Delegates at this year's conference really seemed take on board that the current generation of adolescents and young adults are dealing with unprecedented challenges and uncertainty. The wide experience and support that could be offered by ISMA members has the potential to make a critical contribution to improving resilience and well-being in our uncertain future.

On my return to work, I got the go-ahead to organise a cross-institutional approach to INSAD this year; clearly the time seems ripe to provide better support and understanding for the next generation. Thanks Carole and team for an inspiring day!

MIKE SEGALL, ISMA TRUSTEE

'As I looked back at the ISMA Conference and asked myself how I felt about it, I came up with two facts – that I felt both privileged and delighted.

Privileged to have spent the day listening to such knowledgeable experts in the field of stress and mental health. Privileged to have learnt so much and been on an emotional roller coaster of laughter and tears, particularly listening to Jonny Benjamin's life story.

Delighted to discover that Jonny has agreed to be a Patron of ISMA. And for me personally, both privileged and delighted to have become a Trustee of ISMA.

Now more than ever it is vital that we continue to educate and inform society about understanding mental health issues. We have a wonderful platform from which to do so.'



DEEP RAJAH, ISMA TRUSTEE, HEAD OF CURRENT AFFAIRS, LYCA RADIO

'Being in the world of media, I'm often hearing about the problems people face because of stress. Sometimes I hear about people being on the verge of collapse due to mental health and stress-related issues. I just never realised how much stress affects people, young and old and from different backgrounds, until I attended the ISMA conference this year. The day was very thought-provoking and informative and I learned a lot from the speakers as well as from the break-out sessions at lunchtime.

I will always recommend anyone, from any walk of life, to attend

one of ISMA's conferences, which are so ably orchestrated by ISMA's chair, Carole Spiers. Everyone contributed so well to this conference and I am happy and proud to be one of ISMA's Trustees.'

A LAST WORD FROM CAROLE SPIERS, CHAIR, ISMA UK

'What wonderful testimonials! Thank you to everyone who contributed their positive thoughts.

After a very successful 2017 conference and a best-ever International Stress Awareness Day (INSAD) on 1 November, we now look forward to next year. ISMA celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2018, so we need to make it a very special year. We're going to devote the whole week 5-9 November to stress awareness, with INSAD happening on Wednesday 7th and ISMA's annual conference on Friday 9th.

Our theme, *Does Hi-Tech Cause Hi-Stress?*, will look at two sides of technology: on the one hand, the stressful effects of the 24/7 lifestyle that technology has brought, and on the other, the positive contribution it can make, helping us manage our lives better.

Do contact me at info@carolespiersgroup.co.uk to talk about how you could add value, either as a sponsor or as a contributor, at our events next year.' ■

Biography

Carole Spiers MIHPE FISMA is CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress management and wellbeing consultancy. She is an international Motivational Speaker and is regularly called upon by the national press and media for comment. Carole is Chair of the International Stress Management Association UK [ISMA UK], Founder of INSAD and a Fellow of the Professional Speaking Association.

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Citation

Spiers, C. (2017). 'ISMA UK Conference: Growth 2017'. *International Journal of Stress Prevention and Wellbeing*, 1, 10, 1-4. Retrieved from: <http://www.stressprevention.net/volume/volume-1-2017/volume-1-article-10/>