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Six insights that kept me sane during my **GMC** Investigation

A Guide for Stressed Medical Professionals



By Lizzie Paish – Professional Transformational Coach (MACantab) and her
client Dr X, (MB BChir, MD, FRCOG)



The **six insights** that kept me sane:

01

Who I am, my wellbeing and my peace of mind are not dependent on the outcome of this situation. (My identity as a doctor is only one facet of me and not the source of my wellbeing).

02

Handling this situation requires a different part of my mind than my intellectual, problem-solving, medical mind. (My thoughts are not the truth; my thoughts are the lens that I see the world through; when I am calmer, more helpful new thoughts occur to me than when I am going over and over things in my mind).

03

I can choose how I react to this situation, taking ownership of my actions instead of seeing myself as a victim. (I am the creator of my experience, whatever is happening.)

04

I can choose which thoughts, positive or negative, I focus on. It's more beneficial to focus on thoughts that make me feel better whether they look realistic or not.

05

Fighting is counterproductive. (The stress and exhaustion of fighting are even greater than the stress of the situation.)

06

Good outcomes can come in surprising ways (I can learn not to be derailed by seemingly negative developments along the way such as phone calls, emails, letters from the GMC, additional investigations, because they don't mean the outcome will be terrible).

Introduction – by **Dr X**

It was the scenario I, and all doctors, never want to experience. A complaint against me leading to suspension, repeated investigations, reputational damage, Trust meetings and referral to a GMC interim orders panel.

How was I handling it? I couldn't think straight, I was so stressed I felt sick, I couldn't sleep, I was constantly anxious, and running through worst-case scenarios in my mind. I felt as if my whole world was crumbling, my career was doomed and the future looked extremely bleak. My relationship wasn't going too well, as my partner struggled to understand how this was happening to me, and seemed to be blaming me as well.

I showed up for the many adversarial-feeling meetings with feelings of trepidation, and left feeling battered and belittled. It was hard to imagine how I would ever get my career back on track, whatever the outcome of the GMC investigation. My BMA rep. encouraged me to remain calm and present myself clearly and professionally, but I was struggling to do this as it all felt like a very personal attack and I tended to panic. I felt I was in a terminal nose-dive with my self-esteem.

And yet, before the investigation had even concluded, I had pulled out of that nose-dive and found myself looking at a blue-sky world full of possibility, experiencing hope and optimism. I knew I had what I needed to get my life back on track, whatever that might look like. I was sleeping soundly at night and showing up for meetings coherent and clear-minded. My BMA rep. remarked on how different I was. What had changed?

Through working with a coach and exploring deeply how our minds work, I had a new understanding of who I was, a new perspective on my life and a sense of myself as the master of my own destiny. Despite what was happening, I no longer felt powerless. I was the creator of my experience, and knowing that made all the difference.

Introduction by **Lizzie Paish**

To point out what's possible and have someone see it for themselves, changes lives. To help someone to rediscover who they are, gain freedom from feelings of despair and overwhelm and get back into 'creator mode' in life, is both a privilege and a joy. Once they do that, getting life back on track is simple. Like dislodging a cork caught in netting at the bottom of the ocean, once freed, rising back to the surface is inevitable.

Usually when I begin working with clients, they, like you perhaps, can see no positive way forward. The future may look bleak or at the very best unpleasant; all options seem unwelcome; there seem to be so few possibilities, all of them bad.

But there's one thing I can tell you is true for everyone who feels stuck or hopeless: what you can currently see is NOT the whole picture. There are far more possibilities than are visible to you right now. There are ways to recover your peace of mind, regardless of the circumstances.

That's why I can hold onto hope for my clients when they have none. No one will persuade me that there is no way forward, no good outcome, that they are broken, permanently lost, that their life is ruined. You will never convince me that it's impossible for you to get through this current situation and thrive in the future.

When Dr X came to me, stressed, losing sleep, worn down by the process, I knew that thriving was on the cards. Ten months into an investigation, I knew that they didn't have to wait for the end and the desired outcome to rediscover peace of mind. Thank goodness – because what if the desired outcome never happened? Fault or otherwise, sometimes proceedings conclude against you. What if even then you can be OK? Wouldn't that take a lot off your mind?

Together we set off to explore over the next twelve months the ideas in this booklet. Ideas that can change your experience of a situation no one would ever choose, but which might just lead you to discover some incredible things about yourself and about what's possible for everyone.

The following points summarise some of the elements Dr X and I discussed during our coaching sessions. No document can hope to encapsulate the essence of these deeply personal conversations, and there are many more ideas that could have been included. Insights are literally 'sights from within' – a deep realisation of something you've not seen before. An insight explained is only an idea, until you see the truth of it for yourself, but then it can be life-changing. So, as you read these six insights, I encourage you to keep an open mind and look for stirrings of hope and possibility within you. Read them as if you already know they are true. Read them as practical things you can know or do, starting now, that will help you to feel better. What have you got to lose? I can guarantee that if you take them on, and start acting on these insights, you will start to feel better immediately.

I hope that you will hear something for yourself in these six insights that may nudge you towards a shift in perspective and set you back on the path to thriving.

Realising the truth of these will transform your experience of the situation you are currently in, as well as all sorts of other things in both your professional and personal life.

I invite you to read more about each below, and reflect on them for yourself.

Committing to your own growth and development through this situation, however unwelcome, is a powerful decision that will change everything.

Chapter 1

True identity vs job title/role

Who I am, my wellbeing and my peace of mind are not dependent on the outcome of this situation.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Recognising your essential self as separate from your identity as a medical professional.

The value for you

- The attack on your professional identity feels less destructive and frightening.
- You experience less stress.
- You are able to present yourself more effectively.

Your roles in life, your achievements and your job title are not who you are. They take up a significant part of your life, but they are not YOU! It is very common, however, for us to become attached to these things as if they are the most important aspect of us, and the identities we have constructed over the years can feel as if they are the only reality. Not surprisingly then, when this identity is attacked, criticised or questioned in some way, we feel as if our whole world is being torn apart.

Fortunately, we are way more than the identities we have built up or taken on. We are the creative energy which built those identities in the first place. We are not at our core doctors or surgeons or experienced professionals, those are all things we have created. As creators, we have the power to create ourselves differently, or think our way into a new experience.

Our capacity to thrive, the essentials of our wellbeing, are built in. We often feel that our wellbeing is actually dependent on various things – our job, our relationships, our financial situation, or any number of other things. When we feel our wellbeing is attached to something in the outside world, the thought of losing that thing leads to a lot of stress.

Wellbeing has not been attained by various achievements, nor can it be lost when a particular role is lost. It is innate within us, beyond our recognised physical or mental structures. Realising this takes a lot off our minds, as we are then dealing simply with the practicalities of the situation, rather than feeling we are dealing with the potential loss of our entire identity.

Note from Dr X: I realised that my identity as a doctor is only one facet of me. Even if this aspect of my life was completely taken from me, I saw that I could be OK. I could create something new and rewarding, just as I had with my medical career. That doesn't mean I gave up on my career, but letting go of believing it was essential to who I was and to my wellbeing allowed me to relax. The result was that I showed up to meetings calmer and feeling more empowered and came across better. I also spent a lot less time worrying about the outcome.

Action:

Spend time thinking about other facets of your life. Reflect on things that are going well. Consider the possibility that your wellbeing is independent of your professional achievements.

Chapter 2

Intellectual mind vs intuitive mind

Handling this situation requires a different part of my mind than my intellectual, problem-solving, medical mind.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Finding ways to allow your mind to settle.
- Taking a break from trying to intellectually solve your problems
- Listening for deeper intuition.

The value for you

- Relief from constant overthinking.
- A more positive experience of everything in life.
- New ideas of how to move forward.
- Better sleep.

Without doubt you are a highly educated, intellectually gifted person. You wouldn't be in the job you are in if that wasn't the case. You can analyse, process, research, debate, solve problems and assess risk better than most of the population. But there are times in life when all that expertise is not helpful. In fact, it can be an obstacle unless you recognise it.

This is one of those times.

You will not find peace and relief from stress, anxiety, anger and fear through intellectual analysis. It is an excess of thinking that is causing your painful feelings. A different process is required. One that takes far less effort but may not be obvious when your intellect keeps trying to get in on the job.

Our thinking is our interface with the world. At all times we are experiencing our thinking alone. Whether we are thinking about what is in front of us, something from the past, or an imagined future, our feeling response to it can be just as powerful. If we have painful, negative or pessimistic thoughts, we will feel pain, stress and hopelessness.

It therefore makes sense to spend as little time as possible thinking about the things that create those feelings.

There will be times in the process you are going through when you need to put your attention on a task in hand. There are many other times when you do not need to be thinking about the situation – but you are doing so anyway. You may be looking back at the past and wondering how you could have done things differently, or you may be imagining a catastrophic or painful future.

It probably feels as if you can't help but do that. But the reason we allow our minds to linger on these things is because there is a sense that it is somehow helpful. IT IS NOT. When you realise that directing your mind AWAY from those thoughts is what is most helpful to you, it will become something that makes more and more sense to you to do.

Which brings us to the other, much less appreciated way that our mind works. When we are not churning around the same problems, the same thinking, searching desperately for a solution, our mind has a chance to settle down. It is at these moments that fresh, new ideas, insights and inspiration can come to us. When you are used to looking to your intellectual mind for solutions, this can be unfamiliar territory. But it is a resource that everyone I have worked with has experienced at some time in their life. Whether it's that sudden realisation of where you left your keys (after you've given up looking) or knowing exactly what to do in a crisis, almost everyone has stories from their own experience of a sudden helpful insight at a key moment. This inner wisdom is available to us all, but often gets drowned out by our conviction that we will only find the answer from application of our past experience or personal intellect.

Recognising that you don't need to search in your mind for answers and that there is another, more powerful source of solutions, allows the overthinking mind to quieten down.

Note from Dr X: When I started to see that my thoughts are not the truth, I was able to pay less attention to them. I realised that my thoughts are really the lens that I see the world through – and when I was thinking a lot about stressful things, everything looked stressful! I know now that when I am calmer, more helpful new thoughts occur to me than when I am going over and over things in my mind. I started to come up with new possibilities that looked less terrifying and that helped me to calm down even more.

Action:

Consider times in your life when fresh new ideas have come to you out of the blue. Be willing to consider the possibility that something new could occur to you that completely shifts your perception of the current situation. Stop trying so hard to fix things.

I can choose how I react to this situation, taking ownership of my actions instead of seeing myself as a victim.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Taking ownership of what is happening, whether you are at fault or not.
- Getting into action, rather than looking for unnecessary answers.

The value for you

- The ability to move forward.
- Feeling empowered rather than powerless.
- It is easier to see the possibility of a positive outcome and have a positive impact on the process.

Taking ownership of the situation you are in, and taking responsibility for what is happening, is a powerful stance. It does not mean taking the blame, but it does mean taking power back for yourself.

The opposite of ownership is victimhood. You probably see yourself as a victim of the circumstances engulfing you at the moment. Of course it's true that you didn't instigate what is happening. But that does not mean that you have to behave as a victim.

When you see yourself as the victim of the actions of others, it leads to inaction, overthinking and blame. Blaming others (whatever their actions) distracts us into exploring the how, why and who of situations. It also keeps us deep in the problem, constantly explaining, justifying and overthinking, rather than looking for ways forward.

Ownership launches you into action and forward movement. Immediately you take ownership, the question 'What now?' arises rather than 'Why is this happening?' There may be a time for seeing how errors have come about or dealing with the misdeeds of others, but it is not what is important in the stress of the moment. Your priority is to find a way to peace of mind, from where you can access wellbeing and your best ideas for how to move forward.

Taking the stance of ownership of this situation because it is something occurring in your life, enables you to access your own power of influence on the situation.

Note from Dr X: I felt absolutely like a victim at the start of my investigation process. After all, this was all happening to me and it seemed as if I was helpless. As I got more insight into the motivations of other parties, the whole thing seemed less personal. As my thinking settled, I realised there were things I could do to make me feel better even if they didn't resolve the process, and there was such value in that.

Action:

Give up any thought of blame. Look for the ways in which you have power in this situation – particularly over your behaviour and your thinking.

Chapter 4

Focus on the right things

I can choose which thoughts, positive or negative, I focus on. It's more beneficial to focus on thoughts that make me feel better whether they look realistic or not.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Directing attention away from problems.
- Directing attention towards positive aspects of your life.

The value for you

- Feeling more energised and empowered.
- Experiencing less stress and more enjoyment on a daily basis.

The only thing you are experiencing moment to moment is your own thinking. Regardless of what is happening around you, there is an interface between it and you, and that is thought. Whatever you are thinking, you will feel. For example, if you think about an unresolved issue or potential negative outcomes, you will likely feel anxiety and stress. When you are not thinking about them, and get distracted into something else (like playing a sport, or taking your dog to the vet), your stress eases.

Your priority is to reduce your stress and feel better. From there, everything becomes easier. It is therefore essential that you spend the minimum amount of time possible thinking about your problems.

If you start to observe your mind at work on problems or issues, you will see that there are two things going on:

- A small amount of time spent on taking practical steps towards actively resolving problems.
- An enormous amount of time ruminating on them, worrying about them, discussing them, complaining about them, criticising yourself for getting into them, telling other people about them, over-thinking and over-analysing them.

Cut out the second set of activities, or even reduce it, and you will see a dramatic shift in the quality of your day-to-day experience. They are of no benefit to you whatsoever.

You will also notice a reduction in your problems.

Thoughts about our problems will arise (perhaps frequently) and I am not suggesting you waste your time trying to change that. In fact, don't even consider these thoughts a problem in themselves. It's what you do after the thought has appeared which is your point of leverage.

Take it no further.

The simplest way to begin is with the external actions which you can consciously avoid. That is: discussing, complaining, and telling stories about your problems.

Cut these out and you will notice that the internal over-thinking type activities will naturally decline.

The second element of focusing attention is considering where you consciously direct it.

I guarantee that the more time you spend deliberately focusing on what is successful and on things that are going well or that you like (in your work and in your life as a whole), the more good feelings you will experience. It might be the potential for a positive outcome, your great team of supporters, that you are resilient and life will move on your family, your health, your home, the natural world, your children's activities, a good book...anything!

There are many reasons for this which I love to explore in coaching conversations. You experience the feelings connected to whatever you are focused on, and the better you feel, the more 'good feeling' things you notice. This can become a virtuous cycle, in contrast to the vicious cycle of painful feelings you may currently be experiencing.

Focusing can mean in your own mind, but it also means in your conversation. Be in control of how much you talk about anything that looks negative. Direct the conversation elsewhere.

We have been trained to think that it is necessary to focus relentlessly on the problems in our lives in order to fix them. Nothing could be further from the truth. I love to watch the dramatic changes which result from a shift in focus from the unwanted to the wanted as my clients start to learn the impact of this simple change of focus.

Note from Dr X: I began by spending almost all my time thinking about the investigation, what had happened, why it was happening to me, what the outcome would be, what I could do to influence it. But as I learnt to focus elsewhere, I started to enjoy life again – things like looking after my animals, appreciating my family. There were still times when I focused and took the action needed, but thinking about the situation didn't dominate my life any more.

Action:

Refuse to talk about the process of investigation which is going on more than is practically essential. Tell friends you are choosing not to discuss the topic. Consciously initiate conversations about what is going well. Focus your thoughts elsewhere.

Chapter 5

Fighting is counterproductive

Fighting against what is happening is much of what makes this situation so painful.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Differentiating 'fighting' a situation from 'taking action'.

The value for you

- A clearer understanding of what actually moves the needle.
- Reduced overthinking leading to less stress and better sleep.

We live in a society where 'fighting' something seems to equate to taking the most effective action. We feel that if we are not fighting, we are giving up and being weak. This is not the case.

Perhaps you recognise that much of your stress, anxiety and overthinking comes from battling against the situation? It might be trying to get others to see your point of view, trying to prove your innocence, getting people to represent you effectively or provide documents you need.

They all seem like perfectly reasonable things to be doing, and in themselves they are. But the effort it takes to make them happen is a painful struggle. Doing these things calmly, rather than in offensive mode, they become easier.

The feeling that your entire career, reputation and therefore your peace of mind are at stake, makes this seem a battle that you absolutely have to win and therefore you throw everything at it. But the sense that everything is at stake does not enable you to be at your best. Like the 'big points' in a sports match, the pressure often leads to unwelcome outcomes!

As we saw in the section on identity, everything is not at stake. Who you are and your innate wellbeing, potential and ability to thrive are not on the table. Realising this, and the sense that 'I will be OK whatever the outcome' takes a lot off your mind. You are no longer fighting for your survival.

With this realisation comes greater clarity, whereby you can be more deliberate about what is actually going to have an impact on the process. You can also let go of much of the franticness which is not moving the needle, but is keeping you worked up, busy-minded and stressed.

We all tend to believe that the greater the attention and action we commit to an issue, the more likely we are to get our desired outcome. But driving constantly at something at immense personal cost just isn't helpful. Once you see that a good result here is not simply the practical outcome of the investigation, but your own state of mind, this starts to make more sense. Fighting makes less sense.

This does not mean giving up and stopping doing what needs to be done. But as you step back and let your mind settle, you will find it easier to see the next step and take it calmly.

Note from Dr X: As I felt less afraid, I started to let go of the constant battling I was able to think more clearly. I was more positive and professional in meetings and my BMA rep. said I came across better. alue in that.

Action:

Notice where you are battling. Stop, step back and take time to settle – then see what makes sense from that perspective.

Chapter 6

Good outcomes can come in unexpected ways

I can learn not to be derailed by seemingly negative developments along the way because they don't mean anything about the final outcome.

In this section you will see the importance of:

- Not buying into your moment to moment thinking about how things are going
- Not believing the limits of what you or others think is possible

The value for you

- Increased hope and optimism
- More creative ideas and ways forward
- Freedom from being stuck

When we have a negative reaction to an event, it usually seems as if that can be the only possible way to react. For example: 'They are starting another investigation – this is a disaster!' The only possible reaction may seem to be distress, anxiety, fear, hopelessness, etc. But all these thoughts are the result of the overarching belief that we know what the negative impact will be. We are therefore already experiencing thinking and feelings about something that hasn't even happened.

We are always feeling our thinking. So the more we create disastrous future scenarios in our mind and go over and over them, the worse we will feel. We need to recognise that future scenarios are not reality. They may look extremely likely or even certain, but they are not happening. Therefore our thinking about them is unnecessary and unhelpful.

We are perfectly equipped to handle real life – whatever is happening moment to moment. We are not equipped to handle a made-up future, and hence we will always struggle with it.

Therefore consider it a priority to stop your thinking running away into catastrophic futures. This becomes easier and more instinctive as you intuitively see how your mind actually works.

I think one of the obstacles to seeing this is that we have all been brought up to think that being realistic and thinking a lot to be prepared for future events, are essential to coping with life. Often we feel that to do otherwise would be ridiculous. But you can't prepare effectively for something that isn't real. Your so-called realistic future is made up.

We often also feel that to consider positive outcomes that don't look very likely to us would just be stupid and deluded. But wouldn't thinking about that sort of outcome make you feel better? And when you feel better, don't you calm down? And when you're calmer, don't you sleep better and find it easier to make decisions with clarity?

Taking all that into consideration, thinking about positive outcomes looks like a great idea!

You need to look beyond what might generally be accepted as realistic. What have you got to lose by living in (what others might consider) an unrealistic inner world?

You feel what you think. So think about things that make you feel more positive and hopeful. I know without doubt that there is always more possible than we can currently see. Almost every time a client overcomes an intractable obstacle, or a tricky situation is resolved, the answer is something that was previously either invisible, or looked utterly impossible.

Therefore, the answer is simple: be unwilling to accept what seems possible as the limit of what can be achieved.

Note from Dr X: At the start of the investigation, I was knocked sideways by every development - phone calls, emails, letters from the GMC and additional investigations. As I put less meaning on each of these, I realised that I had the choice whether to work myself up about them or not. I also stopped spending so much time thinking about all the terrible things that I thought might happen and just let things move forward one step at a time. I started to feel more hopeful and less fearful about the future. New ideas started to occur to me and I spent more time thinking about those. Everything seemed easier.

Action:

Notice when you are making up a negative future and refuse to believe in it. Direct your attention away from these thoughts. Create positive scenarios in your mind and think about these instead, however unlikely you think they are.

What do you make of this?

If I had read some of these things at the start of my investigation process I might have found them pretty triggering - perhaps you do too? I can assure you, however, that they have made the world of difference to me. I encourage you to sit quietly, breathe deeply and see what insights occur to you after reading this. Is there something here that rings true? I find myself imagining the Big Bang, the huge expanse of the universe and realising that each moment we experience has taken billions of years to arrive here, now. In truth, the processes of Trusts, the GMC and indeed being a doctor, are all momentary blips within the time each of us is here on this planet.

Exploring the insights in this booklet helped me to come through the investigation process not only unscathed, but with a new and deeper understanding of myself.

I hope you find your way back to thriving, as I did.

Dr X



Change is possible for you too...

This booklet is designed to direct you to a different way of thinking about the situation you are in. I very much hope you have found it helpful.

It is always possible for your experience of a set of circumstances to change. However bleak things look, however bad you feel, a breakthrough offering relief from whatever you are going through is closer than you think.

If this booklet has given you hope, but you can't see how these changes can happen for you, I offer you my support as a Trusted Advisor and Coach.

I would like to gift to you an hour of my time to help you get deeper insight into the relevance of any of these points which look most helpful to you. Contact me at lizzie@lizziepaish.com.

You can also listen for more inspiration to my podcast 'It's Good to be Me' on Apple podcasts, or search on any other platform. To receive more free materials and hear more about what I offer, visit my website www.lizziepaish.com

Lizzie

About Lizzie Paish

Lizzie works as a Trusted Advisor and Coach to leaders and professionals in all walks of life. She helps her clients solve intractable problems in the workplace or at home without stress and hard work. She is relentless in pointing to what is really possible and will never give up on reminding you what you have going for you.

Lizzie offers one-to-one coaching, individual retreats (in person or online) to clients worldwide and group retreats in the UK.

Lizzie loves to explore the overlap between different ideas. She questions traditions, rules, and boundaries and seeks answers in territories where others might not think to look. She teaches an understanding of the mind which transforms lives helping make the invisible visible, leading to innovative and surprising ideas and breakthroughs.

Lizzie lives in Derbyshire, UK, and appreciates the beauty of the natural environment, the opportunity to work with extraordinary people, and the incredible potential in every human being.