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DOCTORS, BURNOUT AND THEIR OWN MENTAL HEALTH



Wednesday, 3 April 2013. This was the day I turned 37. This was also the day that I was admitted into Life Poortview with burnout, and major depression. The admission had come after my GP Dr Marlin McKay had come to my house on a Sunday to assess my situation. I was weeping uncontrollably. I had called him to let him know that I think I had had a mental breakdown and I needed professional help. The months leading up to my breakdown had been harrowing. I had been on auto pilot I wasn't myself I could not meet tasks at work. I couldn't make simple decisions like deciding what to wear to work and I felt like dying. I had reached out to a few friends around me and none of them understood what I was going through. The problem is, when you are always happy and chirpy like I was, when you do need help, people do not see it. Depression is a debilitating disease which can be sorted out with professional help. The problem is, as a medical doctor, who do you turn to when you have a mental illness? Who do you trust with your mental illness? Who

do you trust enough to make the diagnosis for you and to help you? I was fortunate to find help and love when I needed it the most. I remember the voices that would go round and round and round in my head. Telling me that I was a useless doctor, I was a useless mother, I was a useless wife, I was a useless manager and that the

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only option would be for me to die. Those voices were relentless. I would hear them the most at night after midnight when everything was quiet. During the day, it is easy to cope with depression because you are busy. You are on autopilot. You are a hamster in a wheel. You do not stop, you keep working and working. You drown yourself in task after task to avoid facing the reality of the emptiness

that is gnawing away inside you. I spoke out about my depression after the death of Robin Williams. I grew up in Harare Zimbabwe and there is a programme called "Mock and Mindy" that I loved so much. That was my introduction to Robin Williams and I went on to watch a few more of his movies. He was always the funny man. Always the cheerful one. Always making people laugh. The life of the party. Aren't many of us just that? Always helping our patients. Never taking timeout for ourselves. Always making sure that everyone else around us is fine except ourselves. Robin Williams's death



