

This article is downloaded from



<http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au>

**It is the paper published as:**

**Author:** A. Kelly, J. Coyle, H. Latham and A. Corbo Crehan

**Title:** Cynicism and emerging professionals: a cross disciplinary panel discussion

**Journal:** Australian Journal of Professional and Applied Ethics **ISSN:** 1328-4576

**Year:** 2010

**Volume:** 11

**Issue:** 1 & 2

**Pages:** 1-12p

**Abstract:** Cynicism is an ever-present characteristic of many professions. This is in stark contrast to the idealism that new practitioners often bring to their work. A range of ethical issues, related to professionalism and performance of professional roles, arise from such a dichotomy. One ethical issue of importance concerns the responsibility of established professionals to educate and mentor people entering the profession. To what extent, if any, should the potential for cynicism be pre-empted? Are experienced professionals obliged to challenge or even deflate the idealism of new practitioners? These questions, and other related ones, were considered in the context of a panel discussion at the Conference, framed around American thinker David T. Wolfs much quoted saying "Idealism is what precedes experience: cynicism is what follows". An interactive discussion involving the audience and panel members was a key tool used to explore these questions. This paper reports on, and develops, the key ideas explored during that discussion.

**Author Address:** [akelly@csu.edu.au](mailto:akelly@csu.edu.au) [jcoyle@csu.edu.au](mailto:jcoyle@csu.edu.au) [hlatham@csu.edu.au](mailto:hlatham@csu.edu.au)  
[acorbocrehan@csu.edu.au](mailto:acorbocrehan@csu.edu.au)

**URL:** <http://www.cappe.edu.au/publications/ajpae.htm>

[http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=14502&local\\_base=GEN01-CSU01](http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=14502&local_base=GEN01-CSU01)

[http://unilinc20.unilinc.edu.au:80/F/?func=direct&doc\\_number=001154593&local\\_base=L25XX](http://unilinc20.unilinc.edu.au:80/F/?func=direct&doc_number=001154593&local_base=L25XX)

**CRO Number:** 14502

# Cynicism and emerging professionals: a cross disciplinary panel discussion

Andrew Kelly  
*Charles Sturt University*

Julia Coyle  
*Charles Sturt University*

Heather Latham  
*Charles Sturt University*

Anna Corbo Crehan  
*Charles Sturt University, CAPPE*

## 1. Introduction

Cynicism is an ever-present characteristic of many professions. This is in stark contrast to the idealism that new practitioners often bring to their work. A range of ethical issues, related to professionalism and performance of professional roles, arise from such a dichotomy. One ethical issue of importance concerns the responsibility of established professionals to educate and mentor people entering the profession. To what extent, if any, should the potential for cynicism be pre-empted? Are experienced professionals obliged to challenge or even deflate the idealism of new practitioners? These questions, and other related ones, were considered in the context of a panel discussion at the conference, framed around American thinker David T. Wolf's much quoted saying 'Idealism is what precedes experience: cynicism is what follows'. An interactive discussion involving the audience and panel members was the key tool used to explore these questions.

For the purposes of the panel, cynicism was defined as

... both a general and specific attitude, characterized by frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution (Andersson and Bateman, 1997, p. 450).

During the course of the panel discussion, however, the 'real' nature of cynicism (what *exactly* we mean when we talk about it, and how *exactly* it differs from related terms like *burn-out* and *healthy scepticism*) was questioned a number of times, and for this reason we have included a section in this paper critiquing the concept.

The panel comprised a facilitator and three speakers, all with current roles in tertiary education, but with backgrounds as practitioners in policing, physiotherapy, nursing and medicine. Despite the differences in professional backgrounds, a key similarity between all panel members lay in the fact that each represented a profession that requires high levels of interaction with people, often in demanding and challenging contexts. The panel members were people with experience of both practitioner and educational arenas so that the discussion could encompass the journey of practitioners from student to experienced professional.

In this paper, we describe and expand on the issues raised in the discussion, highlight the links between discussion issues and current research, and make recommendations regarding directions for future research in the area.

## 2. Defining cynicism – some key issues

Our original definition of cynicism identified a number of key factors, including frustration, disillusionment, negative feelings, and distrust. During the panel discussion, two general observations were made which are relevant to this definition. First that cynicism is made up of a number of factors, not all of which may be considered negative; and second that there is a level of vagueness that surrounds the application of cynicism. This section will briefly consider each in turn to provide a foundation for the remainder of this paper. It is important to establish that we accept the assumption found in the literature that cynicism is negative rather than positive. However, we hold that cynicism is not wholly negative as it is related to *healthy scepticism* and *being realistic* which can be forces for good in professional contexts.

As Andersson and Bateman (1997) imply (see previous quote), the definition identifies factors that *jointly* capture the essence of cynicism. Each factor in isolation is insufficient. In fact, each factor considered in isolation has the potential to be a positive factor in professional practice. For instance, a frustrated doctor who undertakes additional research to fully understand a patient's problem; a nurse who, in distrusting a patient's test result as it lacks correspondence with her observations, asks for the test to be repeated. Both of these instances that arose from negative feelings, may lead to personal and professional satisfaction for bringing about positive results for their patients. This leads to the interesting observation that while cynicism is properly considered to be negative, it may involve factors with positive characteristics.

The second observation relevant to a definition of cynicism was that there was a degree of vagueness around the individual factors of the definition. For example, do 'negative feelings' refer to '... a conviction that [the 'procedures, processes, and management' of 'one's employing organisation'] generally work against the employee's best interests' (Wilkerson, cited in Wilkerson *et al.*, 2008, p. 2274). That is, do such feelings encompass a 'negative expectancy' (*ibid.*), a bleak outlook on both the present and the (foreseeable?) future? Need 'disillusionment' extend to 'a refusal to engage with the world as much as a disposition of antagonism towards it' (Bewes, 1997, cited in Kosmala and Herrbach, 2006, p. 1400). And of whom is the cynical professional distrustful – clients, colleagues, regulating bodies, employing bodies, themselves, all of these or only some of them?

Interestingly, when we sought out more complete and specific definitions of cynicism after the panel discussion, we found none that avoided the sorts of infelicities to which we have alluded. What seems important for our purposes, however, is that whatever definition is settled on should be one that 'speaks to' the professional context. Following Fullinwider, we take three characteristics to be central to what constitutes a profession, *viz.*, 'performance for public good', 'special knowledge and training', and 'that other people are rendered especially vulnerable or dependent in their relationship to the practice of the professional' (Fullinwider, 2002, p. 73). A definition of cynicism that is applicable to the professional context should have something to say about each of these elements. Returning, then, to our working definition of cynicism, this could be made more robust if it were altered in something like the following way (additional text is italicised):

[cynicism is] ... both a general and specific attitude, characterised by frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution *that interferes with a professional's ability to identify and act for the public good and/or to maintain the knowledge and training base which informs their professional practice and/or to demonstrate the appropriate care and respect for the vulnerability of their clients* (based on Andersson and Bateman, 1997, p. 450).

We acknowledge that this definition does not remove all the vagueness discussed above. However, we believe that it does provide focus, reducing the vagueness and allowing for easier application. We present this profession-based definition of cynicism as a starting point for further discussion and refinement, subsequent to new understandings of cynicism and professional practice. Establishing this definition here is important as we believe it was the one informing the discussion that took place during the panel. Therefore, we will adopt the above as the working definition of cynicism from this point onwards in the paper.

### **3. Background**

The idea for the panel topic initially came from discussions between two of the authors and their colleagues working in the area of police education. Cynicism is a recognised issue amongst police (e.g. Chan and Doran, 2009; Björk, 2008; Bennett and Schmitt, 2002), with causes that have been posited to include (but not be limited to) 'loss of respect for the law', the tediousness of much police work (Graves, 1996, p. 3), the 'discrepancy between what ... [they] are commanded to do and what they can realistically be expected to accomplish' (Bennett and Schmitt, 2002, p. 494), and even size of the police service itself (*ibid.*, pp. 496-497).

It is evident that cynicism has a morally corrosive effect on professionals and their practice. In the policing literature, cynicism has been linked to occurrences such as the beating of Rodney King and the shooting of Amadou Diallo (*ibid.*, p. 494). More mundane situations exist: the officers who delay in attending a domestic violence call-out due to cynicism about the victim's intentions (is she just doing this to further her cause in a Family Court matter?); the officers who 'don't hear' a radio call because it is near the end of their shift and overtime payments have been restricted; the police who ignore exculpatory evidence because a particular suspect has always lied in the past. Not only is there a clear erosion of officers' own private and professional values in these cases, but their entitlement to be called professionals is called into doubt given that their (arguably) core professional function of serving the public is being disregarded. Their disillusion with victims' reactions to domestic violence processes, their frustration with pay issues and their systemic distrust of a particular suspect, each interfere with the officers' ability to discharge their core professional obligations.

Are professionals by their very nature, or by virtue of their obligations, or the vulnerabilities of their clients, destined (or doomed) to become cynical? Although many professionals might say 'surely not', what are we to make of findings such as those from Arthur Niederhoffer's study of the New York City Police Department in 1967. In this study Niederhoffer concluded, *inter alia*, that 'police cynicism is an unintended consequence of the professionalisation of policing' (*ibid.*, p. 495). Therefore, is professionalisation and policing simply a bad combination; or is it professionalism itself that leads to cynicism?

From these reflections, the idea for the panel was born. After some initial discussion, four assumptions were settled on to frame the panel discussion. First, that new

practitioners are by their nature quite idealistic, with idealism defined as ‘the cherishing or pursuit of high or noble principles, purposes or goals’ (cited in Smith & Weaver, 2006, p. 32). Second, that experience in the workplace can, and often does, lead to individuals becoming cynical with cynicism being defined as both a general and specific attitude, characterised by frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and ‘distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution’ (Andersson & Bateman, 1997, p. 450). Third, that cynical individuals can and do influence workplace culture and can and do undermine some of the key characteristics of what it is to be a professional. Finally, that people employed in certain professions, including those represented by the panel, are more likely to be cynical because of their workplace experiences.

Cynicism, which is not a new phenomenon, dates back to the ancient Greeks where the Cynics rejected all conventions and advocated the pursuit of virtue in a simple, non-materialistic lifestyle. ‘Based on a philosophy of action, rather than introspection, the Cynics believed that virtue must be practiced’ (Kennedy 1999, p. 48), a view that sits oddly with contemporary uses of ‘cynicism’ and the links we are discussing to poor moral practice on the part of cynical professionals. In the context of the workplace, cynicism includes ‘distancing oneself from work itself and ... the development of negative attitudes toward work in general’ (Greenglass, Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2001, p. 212). Arguably, idealism is the opposite of cynicism, particularly when it is measured against the actions and attitudes of an individual in the workplace. A cynical attitude might be revealed by an individual’s verbal and non-verbal communication, their work ethic, lack of attention to detail and poor treatment of co-workers. Idealism might be evident in the individual’s enthusiasm and passion for a task (even though unrestrained idealism may lead to unrealistic applications of that enthusiasm and passion).

While cynicism and idealism will impact on a practitioner to varying degrees during their entire career, the panel discussion was limited to the period of a practitioner’s career when they are most susceptible to the influence of cynicism and idealism: recruitment, education and early career. Three themes emerged from the panel discussion, around which the remainder of this paper will be structured: balancing idealism against reality in educating professionals; cynicism, practice and educating the emergent practitioner; and offsetting cynicism (the importance of scepticism, realism, pragmatism and support).

#### **4. Balancing idealism against reality in educating professionals**

Studies have shown that there are many common motivating factors that influence people to enter a new profession (Kyriacou, Hultgren & Stephens, 1999). In their study of student teachers from Norway and England, Kyriacou, Hultgren and Stephens showed that the students were motivated by altruistic reasons (teaching is seen as a worthwhile and important job), intrinsic reasons (the activity of teaching itself is a motivator), and extrinsic reasons (including long holidays, pay and status). The importance of altruism as a core motivator is supported by a study of student nurses in England where it was found that a key motivation for being a nurse was an ‘inner sense of vocation’ (Holland, 1999, p. 232). That is, many of the student nurses were drawn to nursing and to helping and caring.

*Students could be forgiven for having skewed ideas about their chosen profession, given all the misconceptions and inaccurate portrayals in the media and on reality TV (panel member).*

Reality television shows such as *The Recruits* (police), *Bondi Vet* (veterinarian) and *RPA* (medicine, nursing and allied health) are arguably as influential as a recruitment tool as they are as entertainment. Indeed, many organisations such as the NSW Police Force have granted media and filmmakers inside access to their organisations as a means of marketing the profession. Panel members argued that recruits often enter courses with a heightened sense of idealism, often with an unrealistic understanding of the kind of experiences and work they would be carrying out. This is supported by the literature; for instance, physiotherapy students have been found to have an unrealistic understanding of the demands and scope of their role as a qualified professional (Clouder and Dalley, 2002). Although reality television is one cause of this lack of reality and heightened sense of idealism, other factors reflecting a person's own experiences and understanding of the profession are arguably more influential.

Balancing idealism with more accurate perceptions of professional roles was seen by the panel as an important element in the early stages of the education of professionals and especially during student exposure to work experience.

*There is a need to deconstruct students' understanding of their chosen profession, to provide opportunities for them to learn some of the realities for themselves, to recognise some downs...Discussion around student goals, aspirations and expectations ... is important (panel member).*

The importance of such balancing was based on the view that while cynicism is regarded – by definition – as detrimental to professional practice, idealism could be similarly detrimental. The idealistic practitioner is likely to have, for instance, at least some unrealistic expectations of the responses they will receive from clients. Consider the student police officer who thinks everyone will automatically obey her directions, or the student physiotherapist who thinks everyone will automatically take his advice about exercise. These sorts of expectations can lead to patterns of interaction which are not, in fact, in the client's best interests (and are, therefore, inimical to professional practice). For instance, some clients' interests may best be served by assuming they will be unwilling to engage in therapeutic exercise and therefore suggesting an exercise regime that seems less burdensome. Or the police officer may decide to adopt harsher attitudes to secure obedience, not realising they are thereby alienating potentially helpful witnesses or particularly vulnerable victims and are, therefore, less able to do their job well.

Moreover, it appears to be the case that the higher a new practitioner's idealism, the greater the possibility that they will succumb to cynicism. The physiotherapist who assumes that clients will accept his view of what will be in their best interests is more likely to become disillusioned about the impact he can make, than the physiotherapist who has a more realistic view of clients' reactions to professionals' advice. More succinctly, the view was expressed that if idealism were not tempered with a dose of reality, practitioners were at greater risk of becoming cynical – simply because they would be starting from a point of expectation that could not be met and which, unmet, was likely to lead to cynicism.

The role of educators and their influence on new practitioners in providing this 'dose of reality' was a significant theme of this stage of the discussion with the key question being: is it the role of educators to dispel idealism and provide a more rational perspective of the profession (or should someone else take on this role)? (Related issues included: should students be protected from the cynics in their profession, and, do practitioners bring their cynical attitudes with them when they become educators?)

The panel suggested that the idealistic new practitioner believes they and their profession are important to society, that hardships and problems in society and the workplace can be overcome, and that there is an intrinsic value in what they are doing. They discussed the importance of educators raising both good and bad aspects of the profession, so that by the time students enter the field they are prepared for the reality of the workplace culture.

*As an academic, one of the decisions we have to make is when to expose them to the realities of the profession such as cynicism and cynics (panel member).*

Work experience and internships were seen as an important step in the transition from idealistic student to realistic practitioner. Experience allows students to realise the scope of their professional role and decide if they have a future in it. It also protects them from the cynicism that is likely to follow from unrequited idealism. However, it was agreed that cynical practitioners, in the role of educator, were unlikely to get the best educational outcomes from students. Students imbued with a cynical approach to their profession were unlikely to take seriously the learning they were engaged in. If 'clients aren't going to listen anyway' or 'managers won't care about your ideas', there is less motivation to learn how to engage in good professional practice, since such practice will not be valued in any case. Essentially it was considered important to provide students with a balanced perspective of the profession that encompasses both idealistic and realistic views.

*Educators can help students manage change and have the capacity to be agents of change so they will be able to manage the challenges, differences, personalities and multiple cultures of the workplace (panel member).*

As students gain more exposure to the realities of the profession through contact with ex-practitioners and workplace experience, they should be encouraged to think critically about how they can make a difference. The panel discussed the problem idealistic students and new practitioners face in being agents for change when faced with mastering the many aspects of their new role. Rather than change practice, novices often feel compelled to mirror practice until they have sufficient grasp of their role. However, the transition from novice to new practitioner and finally to master, is associated with an ability to negotiate workplace cultures and reflect on and appreciate the influence of cynicism on their own practice.

## **5. Cynicism, practice and the education of emergent practitioners**

Panel discussion of cynicism within the represented professional groups highlighted a range of causal factors. Various studies examining the causes of workplace cynicism have linked factors such as workplace burnout, defined as 'when a person has reached a state of mental and physical exhaustion combined with a sense of frustration and personal failure' (Balogun, Titloye, Balogun, Oyeyemi and Katz, 2002), emotional exhaustion and professional efficacy to cynicism.

Nurses have been identified as a high risk group for burnout because of the demands associated with caring for others, organisational expectations and the high emotional expectations of patients (Allen and Mellor, 2002). In addition, a persistent feature of health practice organisational restructuring and downsizing (with the need to provide the same level of care to patients with fewer resources and less time), has been linked to heavy workloads (Burke and Greenglass, 2001). When these factors are accompanied by the need to balance family responsibility, burnout results (Burke and Greenglass, 2001). Research findings from physiotherapy show high levels of burnout that can occur within

five years of graduation (Balogun, Pellegrini, Miller and Katz, 1999), associated with emotional and physical symptoms and, ultimately, attrition from the profession (DiGiacomo and Adamson, 2001; Scutter and Goold, 1995).

Contributors to emotional exhaustion included work overload generated from a lack of physical and human resources, downsizing and restructuring of hospitals and services, stress and the emotionally draining nature of their job.

*A layer of cynicism is evident across the health professions that is not purely negative in its impact as it serves to protect practitioners by providing professional distance from their day-to-day experiences with people in crisis (panel member).*

In nursing, studies have found that a consequence of cynicism is that practitioners distance themselves from patients as a way of dealing with their exhaustion (Greenglass, Burke & Fiksenbaum, 2001, p. 214). These features and their effects are similarly apparent across the professions represented by the panel and are characterised by a practitioner's behaviour to colleagues, management and the public.

*Cynical doctors use tricks like closed questions to speed up the consultation process. Instead of asking how a patient is feeling the cynical doctor will imply through their tone of voice and closed questions that they have very little time or patience for the patient (panel member).*

It is recognised that such distancing from patients can be detrimental in that it can result in the nurse becoming desensitised and unresponsive to the patient's needs. Oakley and Cocking (2001, p. 141) suggest that professionals can perform their role effectively without developing personal relationships with their patients. They refer to this as professional detachment where it is argued that detachment from patients can be seen to be a necessary part of performing the role and that the professional will not be psychologically detached from their role. It could be argued that nurses in this study who distance themselves from patients to cope with their exhaustion remain proud of their role and the work they perform, and employ this strategy as a way to meet their professional responsibility rather than as a result of their cynicism.

Novices soon realise that their idealistic view of the profession does not correlate with reality. Niederhoffer's study of the New York City Police Department found that disenchantment with the job of policing led to cynicism. Many people entering the force were idealistic, however their experiences as a police officer, both with their own administration and with citizens, led to a degree of cynicism that peaked at between 7 to 10 years service (Bennett & Schmitt, 2002, p. 495). This led to discussion by the panel about the impact of the lack of career progression and promotion on levels of cynicism in their professional groups. In the professional groups represented by the panel, practitioners were required to move out of professional practice, into administrative roles, if they wished to gain higher level promotion.

*Burnout and emotional exhaustion are a reality of workplaces, but often professionals find that there is little that can be done to overcome this issue (panel member).*

This excerpt speaks to the level of disempowerment that professionals often experience in dealing with key triggers of cynicism. Practitioners are faced with fighting the system or finding other avenues to provide a balance to their experiences. Schaufeli and Greenglass (2001) suggest that work is central to one's sense of identify and self-



worth. This would indicate that educators should place importance on strengthening students' feelings of self-worth and include educational sessions on stress management in order to develop in graduates the skills necessary to cope with the challenges of the workplace. This view is supported by the work of Greenglass and Burke (1999) where they have identified the importance of self-efficacy or the belief that one can control challenging environmental demands, and this is consistent with self-determination. Greenglass and Burke (1999) also found that nurses who use higher levels of *control coping* (high level of energy and optimism about changing conditions) in dealing with stress, have lower cynicism and higher professional efficacy than their counterparts who use control coping less. Nurses who believe that outcomes are within their control are less likely to become cynical about their patients when experiencing stress on the job. It is also possible that cynical nurses are less likely to use control coping. A study by Leiter (1999), of nurses in a psychiatric hospital, found that control coping strategies used by nurses were related to less emotional exhaustion and more positive assessment of personal accomplishments.

Although rural practice was not considered by the panel to be a major cause of cynicism in the workplace, the isolation and remoteness associated with working in rural areas has been linked to burnout which can subsequently lead to cynicism (Struber, 2004). Living and working in a small rural community offers the practitioner different experiences. On the one hand rural practitioners become part of a close-knit community which may have a positive bearing on their professional attitude and wellbeing.

*Rural and remote communities still offer rich opportunities to escape the isolation of the workplace culture (panel member).*

However, working and living in such close knit communities may also lead to difficulties as practitioners strive to maintain a necessary separation between their work life and their personal life. In addition, rural practitioners have been shown to experience a lack of professional support and mentoring coupled with social and cultural isolation (Struber, 2004), key factors in decisions to leave the profession.

Overall, panel members shared a belief that,

*There are cynics in the field but there is nothing you can do, or should do, to isolate them from the new practitioners (panel member).*

Interactions between idealistic novices and practitioners whose experiences have led to disillusionment with the organisation and the political context, leaving them with a prevailing sense that nothing they do makes a difference, were considered important. Such interactions may have positive effects on both parties. That is, these interactions serve to balance novices' levels of idealism and reawaken cynical practitioners' sense of vocation. However, as negative outcomes may also arise where the levels of cynicism that are pervading a workplace are persistently voiced, it is important to hold debrief sessions with students returning from work-experience. These sessions enable educators to facilitate informed discussion of experiences to assist students to retain balance in their approach to practice. For instance, the idea that organisational solutions are needed to overcome issues of workplace stress burnout and cynicism has been examined and rejected by some researchers on the basis that organisational solutions address the causes rather than the symptoms (Sheesley, 2001, p. 448). Panel members suggested that strategies to mediate workplace burnout and cynicism are best addressed through direct discussion during professional education, through action by management and peers in the

workplace, and through the recognition of the need for work-life balance with involvement in hobbies, interests and pursuits away from the profession and colleagues.

## **6. Offsetting cynicism: the importance of scepticism, realism, pragmatism and support**

Scepticism, realism and pragmatism were considered by the panel to be necessary attributes for use in coping with difficult circumstances.

*I don't regard myself as a cynic but I am a sceptic. The difference is I am willing to admit when I am wrong, rather than just blame the system (panel member).*

Essentially, cynicism was viewed by panel members as being a sign of a negative attitude to practice. For example, the need to be direct and truthful to students, patients, and victims of crime, is no reason to dispense with the niceties of social interaction. Core communication strategies such as the use of empathy, active listening and rapport building were seen as important for supporting professionals and enhancing their relationship with the public as well as mediating the impact of cynical professionals. A study by Barrett *et al.* (2005) titled *Emotional labour: listening to patient's stories*, found that clinicians 'turned off' from hearing patients' stories to protect them from the emotional labour of work. It was proposed in this research that the expert nurses (as opposed to novice nurses) developed a layer of cynicism which prevented them from hearing the patient's story. It could be argued that the nurses in this study were engaging in professional detachment to cope with the emotional labour of their work. Oakley and Cocking (2001, p. 143) suggest that a feature of the morality of professional detachment from others is the view held by professionals that in the proper performance of their role they can legitimately depart from an attitude towards their clients that otherwise would be a morally appropriate attitude to display. In order to cope with the extent of the emotional labour in nursing while successfully continuing their work and meeting their professional responsibility nurses detached themselves from hearing the patient's stories. It is argued that this distancing, or professional detachment, will enable the nurse to carry out their role and maintain professional integrity as opposed to the distancing that takes place in cynicism where further disengagement by the professional and negative outcomes for the recipients will be a feature of their practise.

Support, both from individuals and from organisations, was seen by the panel as important in offsetting the occurrence and impact of cynicism. This belief is endorsed by the literature. For instance, a study of Dutch teachers found that emotional burnout leading to cynicism was influenced by the uninterested and uncaring attitudes of workplace colleagues (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000, p. 2303). From a social psychological perspective, workplace cynicism was contagious and generated by word of mouth and the actions of the cynic. Arguably, the idealistic new practitioner has less influence on workplace behaviour because of their lower status in the workplace, a reflection of their lack of experience and seniority. Equally, it would suggest that cynicism can be overcome by taking the necessary measures to prevent the cynicism contagion spreading from an individual to the group. In addition, organisational support has been found to be a significant buffer to cynicism (Greenglass and Burke, 1999). In their study, nurses who felt valued and important to their hospital were less likely to become cynical or disengaged from their job (Greenglass and Burke, 1999). Herein lies an important message for administrators.

The panel examined the role of educators and managers in effectively working with the cynicism in the workplace.

*A small amount of cynicism in the workplace has to be expected and is not necessarily bad, but cynicism should not be allowed to define the organisation's culture (panel member).*

The panel session is one example of how academics and professionals can join to discuss and form solutions to balance cynicism against idealism in the workplace. There exists a significant body of research and writing on the subject of cynicism, yet cynicism continues to pervade all aspects of organisational behaviour. For managers, there are no easy solutions to cynicism in the workplace. Addressing organisational issues such as staffing shortages, a lack of physical resources, increasing wages and controlling workloads are likely to improve the workplace environment and decrease burnout and stress. However, it is also important to address the issue of cynicism at an individual level. Realistically, no matter how good and well resourced the workplace is, practitioners in particular occupations will still have exposure to trauma, tragedy, difficult people and difficult situations, leading to cynicism and a loss of idealism.

*Dealing with death and the dying on a regular basis has got to affect you in some way. You're only human and cynicism is a very human way of coping with these issues (panel member).*

An outcome of the panel discussion was the suggestion that managers need to accept that there exists in the workplace a level of cynicism which needs to be addressed in a multifaceted way. Protocols should be put in place to ensure that issues such as cynicism are openly and appropriately discussed and addressed by co-workers and management. A strong support network, employee counselling services and peer support networks are some of the measures in place in some workplaces.

## **7. Conclusion**

Cynicism and idealism contribute significantly to workplace culture and practices in occupations where practitioners are regularly exposed to challenging circumstances, including trauma, violence and social depravity. This article has explored three key themes, (balancing idealism against reality in educating professionals; cynicism, practice and educating the emergent practitioner; and offsetting cynicism), that emerged from an interactive panel discussion on the influence of cynicism and idealism on the new practitioner. There is sufficient anecdotal evidence from the panel discussion and empirical evidence from studies to link cynicism and idealism with workplace effectiveness. The panel discussion led to a number of conclusions. First, new practitioners are inherently idealistic and motivated in their career by altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. An inner sense of vocation is one such idealistic motivator. Second, new practitioners should be exposed as early as possible to the realities of a workplace, and in particular to cynical elements, in order to ease their transition into their new career. Third, managers should address, at an organisational level, a number of factors found to trigger cynicism, such as high workloads, poor work conditions and lack of organisational support. Fourth, individuals may learn strategies that assist them to offset the emotional burden often associated with working in professions, such as those represented by the panel. Finally, educators can play a role in advancing knowledge and understanding of the effects and causes of cynicism and idealism on practitioners and the workplace.

## References

- Allen, J. & Mellor, D. (2002). 'Work context, personal control, and burnout amongst nurses', *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, vol. 24, no. 8, pp. 905-917.
- Andersson, L.M. & Bateman, T.S. (1997). 'Cynicism in the workplace: some causes and effects', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, vol. 18, pp. 449-469.
- Bailey, J. (2005). 'You're not listening to me!: Aboriginal mental health is different - don't you understand??', Paper presented at the *8th National Rural Health Conference*, 10-13 March 2005, Alice Springs, Australia.
- Bakker, A.B. & Schaufeli, W.B. (2000). 'Burnout contagion processes among teachers', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 11, pp. 2289-2308.
- Balogun J.A., Pellegrini E.A., Miller T.M. & Katz J.S. (1999). 'Pattern of physical therapist students' burnout within an academic semester', *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 12-17.
- Balogun J.A., Titloye V., Balogun A., Oyeyemi A. & Katz J. (2002). 'Prevalence and determinants of burnout among physical and occupational therapists', *Journal of Allied Health*, vol. 31, pp. 131-139.
- Barrett, C., Borthwick, A., Bugeja, S., Parker, A., Vis, R., & Hurworth, R. (2005). 'Emotional labour: Listening to the patient's story', *Practice Development in Health Care*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 213-223.
- Bennett, R.R. & Schmitt, E.L. (2002). 'The effect of work environment on levels of police cynicism: a comparative study', *Police Quarterly*, vol. 5, pp. 493-522.
- Bewes, T. (1997). *Cynicism and postmodernity*, cited in Kosmala, K. & Herrbach, O. (2006). 'The ambivalence of professional identity: On cynicism and jouissance in audit firms', *Human Relations* vol. 59, pp. 1393-1428).
- Björk, Micael (2008). 'Fighting Cynicism: Some reflections on self-motivation in police work', *Police Quarterly*, vol. 11, pp. 88-101.
- Burke, R., & Greenglass, E. (2001). 'Hospital restructuring, work-family conflict and psychological burnout among nursing staff', *Psychology and Health*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 583-594.
- Chan, Janet & Doran, Sally (2009). 'Staying in the Job: Job Satisfaction among mid-career police officers', *Policing*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 66-77.
- Clouder, L. & Dalley J. (2002). 'Providing a 'safety net': fine-tuning preparation of undergraduate physiotherapists for contemporary professional practice', *Learning in Health and Social Care*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 191-201.
- DiGiacomo, M. & Adamson, B. (2001). 'Coping with stress in the workplace: implications for new health professionals', *Journal of Allied Health*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 106-111.
- Fullinwider, K. (2002). 'Professional codes and moral understanding'. In M. Coady & S. Bloch (eds.), *Codes of ethics and the professions*. Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press.
- Graves, Wallace (1996). 'Police cynicism: Causes and cures', *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 65, no. 6, pp. 16-21.

- Greenglass, E., & Burke., R. (1999). 'Social support and burnout in nurses: Implications for Interventions', Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Boston, August 20–24.
- Greenglass, E.R., Burke, R.J. & Fiksenbaum, L. (2001). 'Workload and burnout in nurses', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 11, pp. 211-215.
- Holland, K. (1999). 'A journey to becoming: the student nurse in transition', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 229-236.
- Kennedy, K. (1999). 'Hipparchia the cynic: Feminist rhetoric and the ethics of embodiment', *Hypatia*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 48-71.
- Kyriacou, C., Hultgren, A. & Stephens, P. (1999). 'Student teachers motivation to become a secondary school teacher in England and Norway', *Teacher Development*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 373-381.
- Leiter, M. (1999). 'Coping patterns as predictors of humour: the function of control and escapist coping patterns', *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*. vol. 12, pp. 123-144.
- Niederhoffer, A. (1967). *Behind the shield: the police in urban society*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, Inc.
- Oakley, J. & Cocking, D. (2001). *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheesley, D.F. (2001). 'Burnout and the academic teaching librarian: an examination of the problem and suggested solutions', *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, vol. 27, no. 6, pp. 447-451.
- Schaufeli, W., & Greenglass, E. (2001). 'Introduction to special issue on burnout and health', *Psychology and Health*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 501-510.
- Scutter, S.D. & Goold, M. (1995). 'Burnout in recently qualified physiotherapists in South Australia', *Australian Journal of Physiotherapy*, vol. 41, pp. 115-118.
- Smith, J.K. & Weaver, D.B. (2006). 'Capturing medical students' idealism', *Annals of Family Medicine*, vol. 4, Supplement 1, September/October.
- Struber, J. (2004). 'Recruiting and retaining allied health professionals in rural Australia: Why is it so difficult?', *The Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice*, vol. 2, no. 2.
- Wilkerson, J.M., Evans, W.R. & Davis, W.D. (2008). 'A test of co-workers' influence on organizational cynicism, badmouthing, and organizational citizenship behaviour', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 9, pp. 2273-2292.