



Maintaining the psychological wellbeing of health and frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

The uncertainty of the current COVID-19 outbreak require special attention to the needs of healthcare and other frontline workers. Taking care of yourself and encouraging others to practice self-care ensures the ability to care for those in need.

Challenges for healthcare and other frontline workers

- Surge in care demands: Many more people present for care, while increased healthcare personnel are sick or caring for family.
- Ongoing risk of infection: Increased risk of contracting dreaded illness and passing it along to family, friends, and others at work.
- Equipment challenges: Personal protective equipment can be uncomfortable, limit mobility and communication, and be of uncertain benefit.
- Shortages may occur as a result of increased, and sometimes unnecessary, use.
- Providing support as well as medical care: Patient distress can be increasingly difficult for healthcare workers to manage.
- Psychological stress: Helping those in need can be rewarding, but also difficult as workers may experience fear, grief, frustration, guilt, insomnia, and exhaustion.

Maintaining psychological wellbeing of staff

- Ensure basic needs: Be sure that staff are having meal breaks and time to rest. Becoming deprived puts workers at risk and may also compromise their ability to care for patients.
- Time off. Whenever possible, allow staff to do take time off and encourage them to do something unrelated to work that they find fun or relaxing, for example going for a walk, listening to music, reading a book, or talking to friends.
- Connect with colleagues: Talk to your colleagues and support one another. Infectious outbreaks can isolate people in fear and anxiety.
- Communicate constructively: Communicate with staff and colleagues clearly and in an optimistic manner. Identify mistakes or deficiencies in a constructive manner and correct them. Complement each other – compliments can be powerful motivators and stress moderators. Share your frustrations and your solutions.
- Respect differences: Some people need to talk while others need to be alone. Recognise and respect these differences in yourself, your staff, colleagues and patients.
- Stay up-to-date: Rely on trusted sources of information. Participate in meetings to stay informed of the situation, plans and events.
- Limit media exposure: Too much media exposure will increase your stress and may reduce your effectiveness and overall wellbeing.
- Contact family: Contact your loved ones, if possible. They are an anchor of support outside the healthcare system. Sharing and staying connected may help them better support you.
- Do a self-check: Monitor yourself over time for any symptoms of depression or stress disorder: prolonged sadness, difficulty sleeping, intrusive memories, and hopelessness. Talk to a peer, supervisor, or seek professional help if needed.

Adapted with permission from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University.