During Pandemic, Remember to Take Care of Healthcare Workers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s important to remember not only the physical health but the mental health of healthcare workers. Research shows that as much as 40% of healthcare professionals suffer from compassion fatigue and burnout under normal operating circumstances (Mol et al., 2015). Healthcare providers may exhibit physical and emotional symptoms, such as:

- Physical: Team members may state they “just feel worn out.” This is a manifestation of symptoms such as fatigue and trouble sleeping (Nolte et al., 2017). Team members will state they have a lack of energy, and a leader may visualize them drinking more caffeinated beverages.
- Emotional: Team members may state they feel like they are “walking a tightrope.” They may feel like the weight of the world is on their shoulders and like they are letting their patients down (Nolte et al., 2017).

Here are some steps to help address your staff’s mental well-being during an extended event:

- Ensure team members have time to “walk away” from their shift: for a lunch break, regular break, or just to decompress. Team members need time for their minds to reset, so they can continue to provide quality compassionate care.
- Provide a quiet relaxation space for team members (Nolte et al., 2017). This could include opening the hospital chapel 24/7 or creating a room on each unit with low lighting and soft music.
- Ensure team members have access to counseling or employee assistance programs. Consistent rounding by the hospital chaplain or counselor can be valuable.
- Consider limiting the number of days in a row that team members can work, or total hours in a given period (Nolte et al., 2017). In extended events, employees will work many days and hours with no regard for their own health or well-being. They made need to be told it’s “okay” to take a day off.
- Finally, at the conclusion of the event, it’s imperative to debrief with team members. Let them discuss how they felt during the event. Group discussions keep team members from feeling like “they are all alone.”

The continuing pandemic could have long-lasting effects on healthcare workers mental well-being long after the event. Organizations should discuss and implement steps to help mitigate compassion fatigue and team member stress that could further lead to burnout. Be mindful and take care of those who are taking care of your patients.

References:


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