



## Not all wounds are visible: Supporting frontline healthcare workers through a human-centered approach to mental health

**Authors:** Kaisa Wieneke, M.P.H., Luke Shockman, M.B.A., Alison Larson, M.H.A., Eileen Anderson, M.A., Elizabeth J. Larson, MDiv, M.A.O.L., Beba S. Tata, MDiv, BCC, M.P.H.

**Background & Objective:** Since the onset of the pandemic, we have seen people in pain, disillusioned, afraid, grieving in isolation and most of all, hungry for the things that used to satisfy and uplift their spirit: physical contact, community gatherings, communal worship, and work unit and interdisciplinary relationships. The pandemic's rapid onset and prolonged nature has led to increased compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion. Research has shown that healthcare staff are at risk of developing psychological distress and mental health symptoms.<sup>1</sup> According to Rangachari & Woods, 2020, it is important during this pandemic for hospital leaders to recognize that a limited view of employees' psychological safety solely in terms of job security, without due consideration for the broader emotional distress created by the pandemic, could have the effect of severely restricting organizational resilience and adversely impacting patient safety and staff retention during and beyond the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

**Planning/Research Methods:** Mayo Clinic has taken a proactive, comprehensive, human-centered approach to supporting the mental health of frontline staff. There is evidence that taking breaks during the workday is necessary to refuel energy and enhance well-being, but the quality of the break impacts its benefits. Moreover, "regularly detaching from your work tasks – both during the workday and in your off-hours – can help restore energy in the short term and prevent burnout in the long term."<sup>3</sup>

According to an internal Mayo Clinic August 2021 Well-Being Survey sent to 13,007 employees and learners (39% response rate; n=5114), the following information was concluded:

- 60.8% reported having much worse or slightly worse well-being during the pandemic
- 83.2% reported having much more or slightly more stress during the pandemic
- 52% agree that the organization provides support through resources to help them manage their mental health (33% are neutral).

**Implementation Methods:** The internal survey results validated the need to implement strategies which could provide staff a meaningful, uplifting break from their day. Both Tea for the Soul and Support Our Staff (SOS) spaces, were initiated to offer space and resources for respite within the work unit, increase awareness of opportunities to support staff well-being, and offer an experience to decrease their stress in the workplace.

**SOS Spaces:** Inpatient unit-based initiative that provided a quiet space for staff to rest, relax, replenish, and refocus; designed to enable staff to take short, but meaningful breaks. SOS spaces were equipped with art making supplies for creative expression and reflection, refreshments and snacks, a sound machine, gratitude cards, printed materials with well-being resources, and messages of encouragement and support.

**Tea for the Soul:** A spiritual care initiative widely utilized in hospitals and other healthcare facilities designed to nurture caregivers and support healthcare staff who are facing periods of stress, loss, or difficulty. A mobile cart filled with refreshments and a carafe full of tea was wheeled through the units by a volunteer and/or Chaplain who could also offer meaningful connection and conversation. Mental health and other well-being resources were available on the cart for staff to take.

**Results:** Impact was measured by a brief survey from October to December 2021 to assess individual stress levels in response to the interventions, and perceived organizational support.

- SOS kits were deployed to 54 work units. Of the 192 completed pre and post surveys, 95% agree that the SOS Space is one way that the organization cares about the employee. The mean stress score decreased an average of 2.63 points on a sliding scale from 0 (no stress) to 10 (extremely stressed).
- Tea for the Soul reached 1,550 employees. Of the 362 completed surveys, 98% agree that interacting with the Tea for the Soul cart helped them feel less stress, and 98% agree it is one way that shows the organization cares about the employee.

Overall, these interventions demonstrated that offering a space and opportunity to recharge, connect, and take time in the workday for a break positively improves stress levels and perceived organizational support. Future plans include expansion to other care settings. These interventions are two components of a more comprehensive organizational response to support healthcare workers.

<sup>1</sup>Lai, J., Ma, S., Wang, Y., Cai, Z., Hu, J., Wei, N., Wu, J., Du, H., Chen, T., Li, R., Tan, H., Kang, L., Yao, L., Huang, M., Wang, H., Wang, G., Liu, Z., & Hu, S. (2020). Factors Associated With Mental Health Outcomes Among Health Care Workers Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019. *JAMA network open*, 3(3), e203976. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.3976> <sup>2</sup>Rangachari, P., & L Woods, J. (2020). Preserving Organizational Resilience, Patient Safety, and Staff Retention during COVID-19 Requires a Holistic Consideration of the Psychological Safety of Healthcare Workers. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(12), 4267. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124267> <sup>3</sup>Weir, K. (2019, January). Give me a break. *Monitor on Psychology*, 50(1). <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/01/break>