

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

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## BACKGROUND

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, spiritual gatherings, 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>

## OBJECTIVES

- To offer an in-person, work-unit based intervention to support the mental health and emotional well-being of frontline healthcare teams.
- To provide staff with a meaningful, uplifting break from their day as a means for stress reduction and to visibly demonstrate Mayo Clinic takes a genuine interest in employee well-being.

## PLANNING AND 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 available to support their well-being, and offer an experience to decrease 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 Chaplain with volunteer support who could also offer meaningful connection and conversation. Mental health and other well-being resources were available on the cart for staff to take.

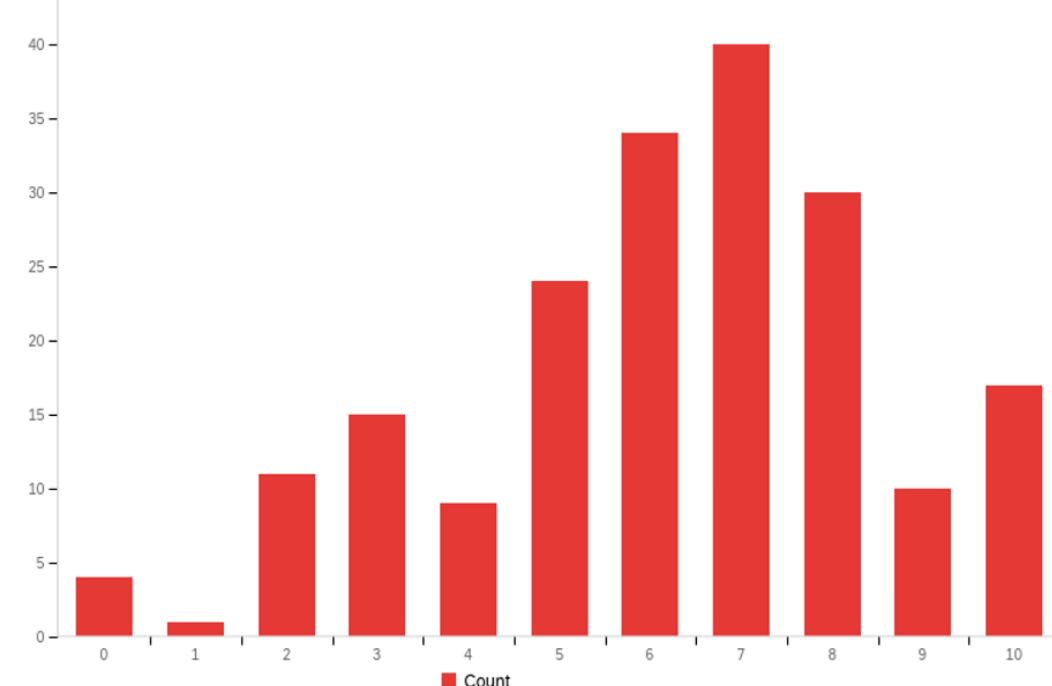


## RESULTS

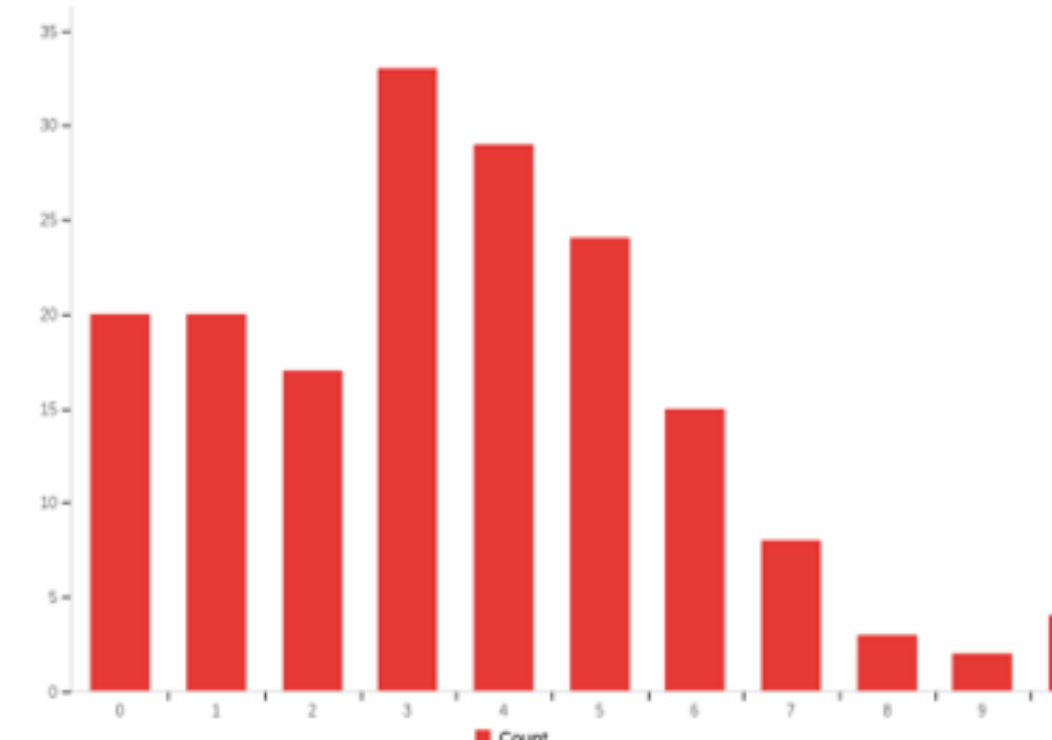
Impact was measured by a brief survey from October to December 2021 to assess individual stress levels in response to the interventions, and perceived organizational support.

**SOS Spaces Results**  
 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).

**FIGURE 1 SOS Baseline**  
 Q2 - Before utilizing offerings in the S.O.S. space, please rate your current level of stress in this moment on a scale from 0 (no stress) to 10 (extremely stressed).



**FIGURE 2 SOS Results**  
 Q5 - After utilizing items in the S.O.S. space, please rate your current level of stress in this moment on a scale from 0 (no stress) to 10 (extremely stressed).



**Tea for the Soul Results**  
 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.



**Qualitative Feedback**  
**Sense of Connection and compassion**  
 "This was so nice of the Spiritual Care Office to think of the Telephone Operators! We are so used to the fast-paced incoming phone calls every day, and during the busy day, we forget to take a moment to clear our head and push out the stress, so thank you for this. It is really very much appreciated!"

"Having the opportunity to take a few minutes of reprieve during the stressful workday has been such a positive experience for our teams. We love the SOS room and Tea for the Soul was such a nice event – between seeing a friendly face, listening to beautiful music on the unit, and enjoying a comforting beverage, we couldn't be more grateful!"

**Emotional support**  
 "So very excited about this. Thank you for all your efforts and coordination in bringing this to staff! I appreciated the opportunity to bring this moment of wellness and self-care to the team. Love the innovative ways your team is finding to support all staff and appreciate everything each of you has done to make SOS and Tea for the Soul a success!"

"Thank you for including us in the SOS program. It was very unexpected and lovely as we are not front line facing but deal with stressful situations placing patients, trying to staff for them, and putting out fires."

**Therapeutic and safe space**  
 "I want to take a moment to express sincere gratitude from team. The SOS initiative that was shared with our team was incredible. My team still comments on how lovely that was for them. The team shared feedback of feeling appreciated, and it gave them a safe, comforted space to relax and decompress from their busy, busy days."



## DISCUSSION

Supporting the mental health and well-being of frontline healthcare workers requires a comprehensive approach. At Mayo Clinic, this includes robust well-being programs and mental health services available to employees to access individually, including self-serve virtual offerings which add convenience. The efforts described here demonstrate the positive impact of bringing support directly to frontline staff in the work unit. This included tools and resources via the SOS kits, as well as the unique skillset of chaplains for in-the-moment support through Tea for the Soul. The results demonstrate the efforts not only reduce stress, but also elevate perceived organizational support at a time when staff are faced with a myriad of challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS

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.

## REFERENCES

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