



ENSURING THE WELL-BEING OF HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The extreme stresses, uncertainties, and health risks associated with pandemics such as COVID-19 require a special attention to the well-being and needs of healthcare personnel providing care to others.

Practising self-care and encouraging other health care workers to engage in self-care sustains the ability to care for patients in need. On the other hand, self-neglect is likely to be detrimental and impedes the ability to provide care to others as well.

CHALLENGES FACED BY HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL

- **Increased patient care demands**

Many more patients present for care, most of them being severely or critically ill posing an increased demand on a healthcare system with limited manpower resources. This often poses increased work demands with longer shifts or no breaks, often working under stressful conditions.

- **Risk of acquiring infection**

Increased risk of contracting the infection during patient contact, and passing it along to one's family members or relatives.

- **Equipment related challenges**

The protective equipment can be uncomfortable to wear over extended hours, with limited mobility and scope for communication. Occasionally, shortages may occur for one or other protective equipment/s leading to anxieties related to exposure.

- **Emotionally challenging experiences**

Patient distress related to their condition can be increasingly difficult to manage for healthcare personnel, and can take a toll. The infection can lead to mortality in spite of best of efforts put in by health care personnel. Such experiences may be emotionally draining for the health care worker.

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING SELF-CARE AND WELL-BEING

- **Meet your basic needs on regular basis.**

Maintain a regular eating, drinking and sleep schedule, adjusted to your duty shifts. Neglecting the basic needs puts you at higher risk and may affect your ability to care for patients.

- **Take designated break times.**

Give yourself a rest from patient care. If possible, do something unrelated to medical care such as listening to a song or talking to a friend or simply doing deep breathing exercises. Remember that appropriate rest or relaxation leads to proper care of patients after your break is over.

- **Communication with your colleagues.**

Talk to your colleagues and extend as well as receive support from each another. Identify the problems or challenges being faced in delivery of health care, work on effective solutions to ease the burden of care, and exchange constructive ideas.

- **Remain connected with family and friends.**

Keep in touch with your family and close friends who form your support network outside the healthcare system. Sharing your feelings and staying connected with them may help in de-stressing you.

- **Stay updated on latest scientific information.**

Gather information from credible sources of information and keep yourself updated on daily basis. Participate in workplace discussions to stay informed of the latest status and guidelines.

- **Limit media exposure.**

A continuous stream of news and updates on social media platforms and variety of news outlets can eat into your time, increase your stress and may reduce your effectiveness. Try to monitor the unnecessary exposure to media, setting a strict time limit.

- **Gauge your mental or emotional health.**

Monitor yourself over time for any symptoms of excessive anxiety or depression or prolonged stress such as changes in mood, insomnia, intrusive memories, hopelessness etc. Talk to a friend, trusted colleague or seek professional help if needed.

- **Appreciate the ‘honour’ and ‘noble calling’ of your profession**

There may be times when it seems challenging to provide constant care for those in need. However, it may help to remember the noble calling of medical profession—taking care of those most in need, which might be reassuring and fulfilling. Give due honour to you and your colleagues’ services towards those in need.

References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/>
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. <https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response>