



PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Healthcare workers (doctors, paramedics and ancillary staff) involved in the care of patients with COVID encounter enormous challenges. The challenges faced by the healthcare workers result in significant psychological distress. The common causes of psychological distress for the healthcare workers are:

- Work condition related: High work load, limited resources, stress related to record keeping, intersectoral coordination issues, hygiene related issues, dealing with demanding and panicking people, stressed co-workers
- Health related: Fear of contracting infection, worries related to own medical illnesses, physical and mental exhaustion
- Psycho-social environment related: Stigma, isolation, discrimination, fear of family welfare if quarantined/isolated, other healthcare issues of family members, work-home imbalance, neglect of family needs,

The mental health issues commonly manifest as

- Feeling irritation, anger outbursts
- Acting impulsively or getting impatient
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, anxious, panic or fearful
- Feeling guilty, helpless, powerless, hopeless
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed or burned out
- Losing interest in things
- Having difficulty solving problems and making decisions
- Having trouble concentrating
- Having negative thoughts
- Feeling sad or depressed or having crying spells
- Having trouble sleeping, night mares
- Persistent muscle tension and aches or other physical symptoms
- Avoiding family and friends
- Blaming and failing to support teammates
- **Death wishes, suicidal ideation**

Measures for psychological well-being: Measures for promoting positive mental health are as follows

Do's

1. **Adopt healthy living strategies:** Everyone should engage and adhere to healthy living practices, which includes:
 - **Balanced diet:** Protein rich, high fibre nutritious food should be consumed at regular intervals. Junk food should be avoided. Skipping meals or binge eating should be avoided.
 - **Adequate rest:** Schedule the daily activities properly. Keep yourself adequately rested before duties.
 - **Proper sleep:** Sleep adequately (for about 8 hours daily). Avoid using screen (e.g., mobile/tablet) before going for sleep to have better sleep.
 - **Regular yoga/meditation/exercise:** Practice regular physical and relaxation exercises for physical and mental well-being. Exercise for a minimum of 30 mins a day, 5 times a week. Deep breathing and relaxation exercises practiced before and after duty hours helps in reducing stress and helps staying calm.
2. **Self-care:** Adopt adequate personal safety measures (e.g., practice hand hygiene, avoid touching face, using PPE [whenever and wherever required], physical distancing, vaccination). Take care of own physical health (take regular medications, as indicated, for medical issues).
3. **Stay connected:** Stay connected with friends, family, and loved ones. Have a designated time and schedule for that. Prefer making phone call or video call over chatting or posting on social media. Also, staying connected with co-workers and colleagues experiencing the same difficulties is important. Sharing and discussing feelings preserves the sense of normalcy.
4. **Use credible sources for information:** Limit exposure to information from unverified sources and any sensational information should be cautiously interpreted. The duration of exposure to social media, print media or news channels should be limited. Look for information at 1-2 times per day, from credible sources.
5. **Take breaks:** Take appropriate breaks from work to do something comforting, relaxing and fun. Distinguish home and work. Take break at home from work, as work will largely be dominated by the pandemic.

6. **Pursue Hobbies:** Utilize free time in doing what makes you happy and relaxed – reading, singing, art, music, poetry, gardening, pet. Try to incorporate 30 mins of hobby time in the routine. Prefer a hobby in which you can actively get involved e.g., prefer singing over simply listening to music. While watching movies or programs, prefer comedy, positive and enlightening programs or movies rather than sad ones. Similarly, upbeat songs should be listened rather than sad songs.
7. If feeling overwhelmed, talk to a trusted colleague/friends. Take one task at a time and concentrate on that only, till it is finished.
8. To prevent frustration, try to accept the situation. Do not deny or resist it. Take necessary steps to address solvable problems. For problems with no immediate solutions, accept and do your best.

Say no to

1. Listening and spreading unverified information and news related to COVID that spreads fear
2. Tobacco, alcohol or other drugs to cope with difficult emotions
3. Excessive screen use
4. Stigma and discrimination
5. Keeping silent if disturbed by your feelings or work. Discuss it with your colleagues and seniors or consult for help.
6. Self-medicating for mental health issues

When to seek help?

- It is expected to feel anxious and slight worry about the current situation.
- When the manifestations are severe and prolonged one should not hesitate to seek help from mental health professionals

Where can you get help?

- Online consultation through e-sanjeevani OPD (Psychiatry clinic)
- Mental Health Helpline number (Phone: 8887019140) Department of Psychiatry, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, U.P.
- You may contact by the departmental Email: psychiatry@kgmcindia.edu
- Directly contacting the Consultants / Senior residents of Department of Psychiatry over phone.