



COVID-19: Psychosocial support for medical teams

Team leaders

Caregivers are exposed to many situations in which they experience emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions that cause difficulties and stress. A significant factor that causes stress is the fear of contagion. The family and their immediate social circle may also add to this pressure due to their concern for the safety of their loved ones who may be exposed to the virus.

To deal with the strain, two time frames are important:

- ❖ Before - mental preparation for working in an environment with those who are sick and isolated (shift entry).
- ❖ After - end of the shift and processing of the experience, which is also tense among the general public.

Preparation

1. **Knowledge reduces anxiety.** Every staff member should be given methodical information to maintain cognitive continuity. Before the beginning of a shift, the team should receive a **briefing** that includes information on the current situation, updated guidelines and emphasis on self-protection.
2. During the brief and shift, it is recommended to reinforce the **significance of the role and the contribution of the work to the public** and family, in order to strengthen motivation. The heavy burden and the difficulties of working with PPE must be addressed, the successes need to be highlighted and the disparities must not be ignored.
3. Focus on what "there is" rather than on what's missing. Adopting a **positive and optimistic approach**: It is important to emphasize to the team the extensive set of actions taken by the Government and other countries to cope with this event and how meaningful the role of the team is as part of these efforts, that there is something that can be done even though we don't have all the knowledge and that we currently have to deal with this crisis with the tools available (experimental drugs, development of a vaccine, quarantine, isolation, etc.).
4. Strengthen **self-efficacy**: help the team members to identify self-coping powers and external sources of support, strengthen their belief and confidence in their skills and ability to deal with difficulties.
5. Build a work routine that allows the staff to feel that they are in the **safest place** – emphasize protocols, use of protective clothing, disinfection, cleaning etc. Maintaining a balance with the **individual needs** of the team members - scheduled breaks, food and drink, communication with family and close friends, communication with other team members etc.



End of shift

The above recommendations should also be applied at the end of a shift. In addition, a number of aspects should be considered when ending a shift and upon return to the family:

1. Give room and legitimacy to emotional expression. It is important to have a discussion at the end of the shift: a 3-step meeting within hours of an event, which aims to assess the participant's mental state and mitigate symptoms if necessary. **Conversation steps:**
 - a. Facts (what happened) and your role in it
 - b. Normalization - 'This is a normal reaction to a difficult and unconventional event'
 - c. Attention to follow-up (with a psycho-social professional) - what symptoms are expected later, should development and/or relief be expected, self-acceptance, patience and tolerance, and finally - providing information (who can help, recommendations and guidelines).
2. Make sure to engage in "battery charging" activities at the end of the shift. Examples: sports, music, prayer, meditation, emotional sharing, etc.
3. Make sure staff members talk openly with their family members about the risks associated with working in a Corona treatment hospital/center. Explain that you take the strictest safety measures and receive the best protection available - and ask them to share with their family the important task ahead of you.

In all stages of the event

Whether the employee is working or at home, it is important to pay attention to responses that indicate stress and anxiety, or to new, unfamiliar responses. If familiar symptoms persist and do not weaken or new ones appear - professionals should be involved.

Despite the importance and willingness of some of the team to talk about the subject – it is not mandatory. If someone does not want to talk, this is also an appropriate way of dealing.

Recommendations for team members

Focus on what "there is" rather than what's missing. Adopt a positive and optimistic approach. There is something to do, even though we do not know everything and we currently have to deal with the difficulties with the tools at our disposal.

Knowledge reduces anxiety. Ask and learn about the current updated situation, guidelines and emphasis regarding self-protection.

Give room and legitimacy to emotional expression. Feelings of stress and anxiety are normal reactions in an emergency and should be expressed. Everyone responds in his or her own way - and every response is legitimate in an emergency.

Routine produces confidence. Maintain life and work routines. Maintaining a daily agenda and regular habits builds certainty and a sense of security.



Identify the forces around you. Your team members share similar experiences, so be open to talking with them. You will find that you are not alone. Share and learn what helps others.

Maintain the roles. The roles in our lives are many - parents, employees, managers etc. Try to maintain balance in your life even during this time.

Know yourself. Identify what helped you through periods of uncertainty in the past, and consciously use the same paths. Adopt relaxation techniques that are suitable for you (there are various methods, breathing, music and so on, training videos can be used).

Make time for yourself! It is advisable to initiate activities that bring you pleasure and well-being such as sport, reading, music, hobbies, crafts, cooking, family, social and the like.

Take care of yourself! Pay attention to your body, behavior, and feelings. Pay attention to reactions that indicate stress and anxiety, or new ones that are unfamiliar. If symptoms persist or new ones appear - professionals should be involved.

Initiative and leadership create security. Get involved, offer solutions and ways of improvement, new initiatives that promote the team and patient care instill confidence in others and strengthen the sense of control and ability, and others will learn from you and follow your lead.

Talk openly with your family about the risks associated with working in a Corona care facility. Explain to them that you take the best safety measures and receive the best protection available. Share with them the important task ahead of you.