

SUSTAINING THE WELL-BEING OF HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL DURING INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS

The extreme stress and uncertainty of global infectious disease outbreaks and often difficult nature of the medical response require special attention to the needs of healthcare personnel. Taking care of yourself and encouraging others to practice self-care sustains the ability to care for those in need.

Taking care of yourself and encouraging others to practice self-care sustains the ability to care for those in need.

time or are taking time to enjoy themselves when so many others are suffering. Recognize that taking appropriate rest leads to proper care of patients after your break.

Challenges for Healthcare Personnel During Infectious Disease Outbreaks

- **Surge in care demands.** Many more people present for care, while increased healthcare personnel are sick or caring for family.
- **Ongoing risk of infection.** Increased risk of contracting dreaded illness and passing it along to family, friends, and others at work.
- **Equipment challenges.** Equipment can be uncomfortable, limit mobility and communication, and be of uncertain benefit; shortages occur as a result of increased, and sometimes unnecessary, use.
- **Providing support as well as medical care.** Patient distress can be increasingly difficult for healthcare personnel to manage.
- **Psychological stress in the outbreak settings.** Helping those in need can be rewarding, but also difficult as workers may experience fear, grief, frustration, guilt, insomnia, and exhaustion.

Strategies for Sustaining Healthcare Personnel Well-Being

- **Meet basic needs.** Be sure to eat, drink, and sleep regularly. Becoming biologically deprived puts you at risk and may also compromise your ability to care for patients.
- **Take breaks.** Give yourself a rest from tending to patients. Whenever possible, allow yourself to do something unrelated to work that you find comforting, fun, or relaxing. Taking a walk, listening to music, reading a book, or talking with a friend can help. Some people may feel guilty if they are not working full-

- **Connect with colleagues.** Talk to your colleagues and receive support from one another. Infectious outbreaks can isolate people in fear and anxiety. Tell your story and listen to others'.
- **Communicate constructively.** Communicate with colleagues clearly and in an optimistic manner. Identify mistakes or deficiencies in a constructive manner and correct them. Complement each other—compliments can be powerful motivators and stress moderators. Share your frustrations and your solutions. Problem solving is a professional skill that often provides a feeling of accomplishment even for small problems.
- **Contact family.** Contact your loved ones, if possible. They are an anchor of support outside the healthcare system. Sharing and staying connected may help them better support you.
- **Respect differences.** Some people need to talk while others need to be alone. Recognize and respect these differences in yourself, your patients, and your colleagues.
- **Stay updated.** Rely on trusted sources of information. Participate in meetings to stay informed of the situation, plans, and events.
- **Limit media exposure.** Graphic imagery and worrisome messages will increase your stress and may reduce your effectiveness and overall wellbeing.
- **Self check-ins.** Monitor yourself over time for any symptoms of depression or stress disorder: prolonged sadness, difficulty sleeping, intrusive memories, hopelessness. Talk to a peer, supervisor, or seek professional help if needed.
- **Honor your service.** Remind yourself that despite obstacles or frustrations, you are fulfilling a noble calling—taking care of those most in need. Recognize your colleagues—either formally or informally—for their service.