



Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and Preventing Burnout for Health Care Providers

Managing distress of health care providers and first responders is important during an infectious disease outbreak. It is common for health care teams to feel anxiety and stress from the rapidly changing events and fears regarding a crisis event such as a pandemic. Additionally, they are concerned about their own health due to increased risk of exposure and the health of their loved ones. Below is guidance and information to help health care teams support their teams and ensure better mental health during and after a crisis.

Common Signs of Distress

- Feeling agitated or short tempered
- Fatigue
- Sleep Difficulty
- Changes in appetite
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, gastrointestinal distress, skin rashes, other body pains
- Increased use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Excessive worry and anxiety

Ways to Cope during a Crisis

- Get proper rest and eat a healthy diet
- If possible, take a walk or participate in other forms of exercise.
- Take breaks throughout the day to refocus
- Seek factual and reliable information
- Limit exposure to the news and speculation around the crisis often found on social media outlets
- Acknowledge the uncertainty of the evolving events and remind yourself that leaders are making decisions based on factual information from experts at WHO, CDC and local health departments
- Connect with others and use your support system to talk about your feelings
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed

Tips for Managers

- Learn the symptoms of distress associated with STS and burnout and educate the team members so they can identify the symptoms in each other
- Encourage the health care team to support each other
- Validate and acknowledge concerns expressed by team members
- Ask staff how they are coping and encourage them to share feelings and concerns with each other, their family and mental health professionals
- Communicate factual information with the team and provide reassurance that the leadership team is managing the crisis effectively
- Remind the health care team of their resiliency and provide confidence and reassurance that they are qualified to manage this crisis
- Express gratitude and appreciation to the staff
- Provide resources for professional mental health providers in your community to the team

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Disaster Distress Hotline 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746

Text HOME to 741741 for a counselor at the National Crisis Text Line

Resources:

<https://www.samhsa.gov/disaster-preparedness>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

<https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-uncertainty>

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4885.pdf>