

COVID-19 AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT ON FRONTLINE HEALTH RESPONDERS

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INTRODUCTION

- For the front line responders: Doctors, nurses, technicians, ambulance drivers, support staff
- COVID -19 has become an ever present threat.
- The fear is real as we have learned so far. This is a highly infectious and contagious viral pandemic.
- The threat to Health workers is global but becomes even more acute in Low resource countries where there is inadequate access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Psychological effect

- Frontline responders are exposed to psychological distress as they interact with, and treat patients
- Psychological distress includes anxiety, burnout and depressive symptoms.
- Exposure to the traumatic experiences of others, predispose frontline health workers to secondary traumatic stress or vicarious traumatization.
- Moral injury (not a disorder) - when you have to make decisions that violate your moral ethics

Preparation

- Are we preparing our health Workers to respond to this crisis



- This is a question for administrators and managers of health institutions
- Who will care for the carers??

Preparing to respond to a pandemic crisis

- Clear roles are important- from the managers and communicated to the providers
- Every head of department/ supervisor should establish a plan about working hours and duty rotations
- How to access and use PPE
- What happens in the event of exposure
- The Health workers needs to explain to family- what is happening in a language appropriate and realistic way and keep them regularly updated. This will reduce family anxiety and take off pressure from self. Attention and concentration enhances safety for self and others.

Stress during a crisis

- FEAR
 - ANXIETY
 - BURNOUT
 - DEPRESSION
 - VICARIOUS TRAUMA/ SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS
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- Recognize the signs of these conditions in yourself and other responders

BURNOUT

- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed.
- **Signs Of Burnout:**
 - Sadness, depression, or apathy
 - Easily frustrated
 - Blaming of others, irritability
 - Lacking feelings, indifferent

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- Isolation or disconnection from others
- Poor self-care (hygiene)
- Tired, exhausted or overwhelmed
- Feeling like:
 - A failure
 - Nothing you can do will help
 - You are not doing your job well
 - You need alcohol/other drugs to cope

Vicarious Traumatization

- Vicarious Trauma/ Secondary traumatic stress – stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.
- Excessively worry or fear about something bad happening
- Easily startled, or “on guard” all of the time
- Physical signs of stress (e.g. racing heart)
- Nightmares or recurrent thoughts and images about the traumatic situation
- The feeling that others' trauma is yours

Coping techniques

- Recommendations for responders: SELF CARE
- **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories**, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- **Take care of your body.**
 - Take deep breaths, stretch, meditate/pray -
 - Eat a healthy and well balanced meals and drink plenty of clean water
 - Exercise regularly indoors or outdoors- whatever you can
 - Try to get plenty of sleep
 - Avoid alcohol and drugs- including hypnotics
- **Make time to unwind.**
- Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- **Connect with others.**

Coping techniques ct

- **A 'Worry Window'**- trying to suppress worrisome thoughts and fears is not a very effective strategy. Some people find it more useful to set aside a time- like 15 minutes or whatever at the same time every day and call it a worry window. Fearful thoughts and worries can then be postponed and allowed to surface at that time- even written down.
- **Deep breathing** also referred to as diaphragmatic breathing is a powerful strategy to overcome fear and panic. There are several good you-tube videos on this.
- **Note- Be careful with Debriefing - has been known to predispose to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Final remarks

- Stay alert and stay safe
- Please feel free to reuse these slides to present to others
- For any questions-
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