

If it applies to health care worker,  
 it applies to you too

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## SUSTAINING THE WELL-BEING OF HEALTHCARE PERSONNEL DURING CORONAVIRUS AND OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS

The extreme stress, uncertainty, and often difficult medical nature of global infectious disease outbreaks, such as Coronavirus (COVID-19), 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.

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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. Compliment 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 well-being.
- **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.