



PROVIDER TIPS

MANAGING PATIENT & COMMUNITY STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

During this crisis, many individuals may experience anxiety and show signs of stress regardless of the objective risk of getting sick. Accessibility of social supports and community cohesion may be reduced. As more cases occur, members of the public may well become increasingly concerned and some may begin to panic. This stress is normal and may be more pronounced in people with loved ones in parts of the world hardest hit by the outbreak.

As healthcare providers, we all have a role to play in helping people cope effectively and manage their stress.

WE CAN

PROVIDE accurate and calming information about COVID-19 risk

HELP the public recognize signs of stress in themselves and their loved ones

TEACH how to relieve anxiety reactions and provide resources so they can seek further help if necessary

5 KEY PRINCIPLES

PROMOTE A SENSE OF SAFETY. Fears can be reduced through education about the means of virus transmission, what individuals can do to protect themselves and their loved ones, and accurate information about the likelihood of severe illness and risk of death related to the illness.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF SELF- AND COMMUNITY-EFFICACY. It is important that individuals, families, and organizations be empowered to take control of the situation to the extent possible. Encourage people to read COVID-19-related information from trusted sources like the CDC website to increase a sense of confidence in their ability to take action. Information about using technology to safely support and share information and resources helps promote community efficacy and a sense of control.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS. Social support is a crucial resource when people are urged to stay away from the sick, avoid large gatherings, and may even face quarantine. Help facilitate connectedness through technology, including telephone support groups, text messaging and email mutual support forums, facilitated web-based chat rooms and video calling.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF CALMING. Both through personal contacts and public messages, providers can promote relaxation strategies via apps, brief advice, and training programs. They can also help correct inaccurate negative beliefs about the virus.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF HOPE. Public communication efforts can focus on what is being done to address the outbreak, resources that are available and hopeful messages related to positive aspects of the large-scale response and the time-limited nature of the outbreak, and inspirational stories of healing and transcending challenging circumstances.

Fostering Adaptive Functioning in the Public

With these key principles in mind, healthcare providers should:

- Clearly and authoritatively convey risk and resilience messages.
- Use a flexible style of communication that is tailored to the stress level and threat level of each person.
- Be culturally competent and thoughtful of people's views, priorities, and preferences.
- Address deficits in knowledge, trust, materials, and resources as they emerge.



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MANAGING PROVIDER STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Dealing with Stress During the Outbreak

Self-care for healthcare workers can be complex and challenging, given that people in these roles may prioritize the needs of others over their own needs. Healthcare workers need to care for themselves, however, in order to be well enough to provide care to others.

HEALTHY BEHAVIORS DURING SHIFTS

- Self-monitor and pace
- Regular check-ins with colleagues, family, and friends
- Work in partnerships or in teams
- Brief relaxation/stress management breaks
- Regular peer consultation and supervision
- Time-outs for basic bodily care and refreshment
- Regularly seek out accurate information and mentoring to assist in making decisions
- Keep anxieties conscribed to actual threats
- Do your best to maintain helpful self-talk and avoid overgeneralizing fears
- Focus your efforts on what is within your power
- Express gratitude to your colleagues and for small successes
- Foster a spirit of fortitude, patience, tolerance and hope

BEHAVIORS TO AVOID

- Working too long by yourself without checking in with colleagues
- Working “round the clock” with few breaks
- Feeling that you are not doing enough
- Excessive intake of sweets and caffeine
- Going without sleep
- Engaging in self-talk and attitudinal obstacles to self-care, such as:
 - *“It would be selfish to take time to rest.”*
 - *“Others are working around the clock, so should I.”*
 - *“The needs of survivors are more important than my needs”*
 - *“I can contribute the most by working all the time.”*
 - *“Only I can do”*

Dealing with Stress in the Aftermath of the Outbreak

After a period of caring for those with COVID-19 — especially quarantined patients — a readjustment period is to be expected. Providers will need to commit to making personal reintegration a priority. This includes:

- Seek out and share social support, which may need to occur virtually
- Check-in with other colleagues to discuss work experiences
- Increase supervision, consultation, and colleague support
- Schedule time off work for gradual reintegration into personal life
- Prepare for worldview changes that may not be mirrored by others in one’s life
- Avoid negative coping strategies such as:
 - Use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or excessive amounts of prescription drugs, which all interfere with sleep cycles and prolong recovery
 - Suddenly making big life changes
 - Negatively assessing your work contributions
 - Keeping too busy
 - Viewing helping others as more important than self-care
 - Not wanting to talk about work experiences with others

FOR MORE RESOURCES, PLEASE VISIT THE OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING WEBSITE
hsc.unm.edu/school-of-medicine/education/wellness/