



COVID-19: Psychosocial support for teams working with the elderly

Team leaders

Caregivers are exposed to many situations in which they experience emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions that cause difficulties and stress. The elderly population has considerable life experience, as well as coping capacities in crisis, uncertainty, stress, etc. At the same time, the elderly can be vulnerable due to the reduction of personal and environmental resources. Coping with loneliness, and the needs of the elderly, may also put a strain on the staff during routine and crisis affecting their functioning.

There are several expected scenarios as the virus spreads:

- ❖ Staff members may be asked to stay at home due to isolation - an event that will increase the burden on the remaining staff members.
- ❖ Elderly may be asked to be in isolation - an event that will lead to additional burdens on the staff, as well as concerns of infection from staff members, their families and the elderly.

To deal with the many strains, two time periods are important:

- ❖ Before - mental preparation for working in an environment with those who are sick and isolated (shift entry).
- ❖ After - end of the shift and processing the experience, in order to continue the daily routine, which is also tense amongst the general public.

Beginning of the workday

1. **Knowledge reduces anxiety.** Every staff member must be given methodical information to maintain cognitive continuity. Before the beginning of a shift, the team should receive an **orderly briefing** that includes information on the current situation, updated guidelines and emphasis regarding self-protection.
2. During the brief and the shift, it is recommended to reinforce the **significance of the role and contribution of the staff members to the extension and strengthening of support circles of the elderly and their families.**
3. Focus on what "is" rather than what is missing. Adopting a **positive and optimistic approach:** It is important to emphasize to the team the extensive activity that is being done around the world and the meaningful activity that the team is part of within this global framework. To preserve the narrative that the effort is broad and meaningful, that there is something to do even though we do not know everything and that we currently have to deal with the difficulties with the tools available to us (experimental drugs, development of a vaccine, quarantine, isolation, etc.).
4. Strengthening **self-efficacy:** helping the staff members and the elderly population in their care to identify coping powers and external sources of support, strengthening the belief and confidence in their skills and ability to deal with difficulties.
5. Building a work routine that allows the staff to feel that they are in the **safest place** – maintaining medical protocols, use of protective clothing, disinfection, cleaning etc. Keeping a balance with the **individual needs** of the team members - scheduled breaks, food and drink, communication with family and close friends, communication with other team members etc.



Conclusion of shift

The above recommendations should also be applied at the end of a shift. In addition, the following should be considered:

1. Give room and legitimacy to emotional expression. It is important to have a discussion at the conclusion of the shift: a 3-step meeting within hours of an event, which aims to assess the participant's mental state and mitigate symptoms if necessary.

Conversational steps that require attention:

- a. Facts and how you relate to them
 - b. Normalization - 'This is a normal reaction to a difficult and unconventional event'
 - c. Attention to follow-up (recommended with an expert) - what symptoms are expected later, should development and/or relief be expected, self-acceptance, patience and tolerance, and finally - providing information (who can help, recommendations and guidelines).
2. Make sure to engage in "battery re-charging" activities at the end of the shift. Examples: sport, music, prayer, meditation, emotional sharing, etc.
 3. Make sure staff members talk openly with their family members about the risks associated with working in a Corona treatment environment. Explain to them that you take the strictest safety measures and receive the best protection available - and ask them to share with their family the important task ahead.

All stages of the event

Whether the employee is working or at home, it is important to pay attention to responses that indicate stress and anxiety, or to new, unfamiliar responses. If familiar symptoms persist and do not weaken or new ones appear - professionals should be involved.

Despite the importance and willingness of some of the team to talk about the subject – it is not mandatory. If someone does not want to talk, this is also an appropriate way of dealing.

Team member

This event triggers a variety of emotions and feelings that sometimes include fear, feelings of vulnerability, insecurity and concern about the future. Powerful emotional reactions are also normal in response to a crisis or significant stress situation. In general, they tend to fade after a few weeks. The strength of teams - in routine and emergency - is mutual responsibility, as well as responsibility for our patients. Now, together we will face the great challenge and work for the benefit of our patients. The safety of each and every one of you is in our minds - which is why we gathered expert advice for this challenging time.



Focus on what "is" rather than what is missing. Adopt a positive and optimistic approach. There is something to do, even though we do not know everything and we currently have to deal with the difficulties with the tools at our disposal.

Knowledge reduces anxiety. Ask and learn about the current situation, guidelines and emphasis regarding self-protection.

Give room and legitimacy to emotional expression. Feelings of stress and anxiety are normal reactions in an emergency. Everyone responds in his or her own way - and every response is legitimate in an emergency.

Routine produces security. Maintain life and work routines. Maintaining a daily agenda and regular habits builds certainty and a sense of security.

Identify the forces around you. Your team members share similar experiences, so be open to talking with them. You will find that you are not alone. Share and learn what helps others.

Maintain the roles of your life. The roles in our lives are many - parents, employees, managers and more. Maintain balance in your life even during this time, when the burden is high.

Know yourself. Identify what helped you get through periods of uncertainty in the past, and consciously use the same paths. Adopt relaxation techniques that are suitable for you (there are various methods breathing, music and so on, training videos can be used).

Make time for yourself! It is advisable to initiate activities that bring you pleasure and well-being such as sport, reading, music, hobbies, crafts, cooking, family, social and religious gatherings and more.

Take care of yourself! Pay attention to your body, behavior, and feelings. Pay attention to reactions that indicate stress and anxiety, or new ones that are unfamiliar. If familiar symptoms persist or new ones appear professionals should be involved.

Initiatives and leadership create security. Get involved, offer solutions and ways of improvement, new initiatives that promote the team and patient care instill confidence in others and strengthen the sense of control and ability, others will learn from you and follow your lead.

Talk openly with your family about the risks associated with working in a Corona care environment. Explain to them that you take the best safety measures and receive the best protection available and share with them the important task ahead of you.