

Tackling Stress Among Healthcare Workers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

M.M. Gulzar¹, J. Ahmad¹, M. Tariq^{1,2}, A.A Syed³

1. Department of Paediatrics, Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise.
2. University of Limerick, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.
3. Principal Clinical Psychologist, Brothers of Charity Services, Waterford.

Dear Sir,

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) was promulgated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 30th of January in 2020 and declared to be a PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern). The combination of a contagious disease, its enigmatic clinical presentation, epidemiological features and rapid transmission rate, have high possibilities for psychological fear. This type of multi-layered and multifaceted fear often leads to psychological issues including anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and stigma. The spectrum of those affected range from fit to at-risk care-workers²⁻⁴. In different individuals, such an outbreak can cause even psychosis-like symptoms⁴. While working on the frontline healthcare workers need to be in a good state of mind to maximize their productivity and patient care. In this difficult working environment, efforts should be made to manage stress and promote resilience.

Similar to the rest of the world, healthcare workers at the Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise were experiencing the same situation of stress and uncertainty. To address this, healthcare workers were asked to attend a short talk on positive aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, so that they could take some time out of their hectic routine. It helped to reduce anxiety while working on the frontline. Positive responses were received from the staff. Thus, sessions needed to be repeated multiple times due to the demand. At the end of the sessions, healthcare workers were asked to write some positive things they noticed at their workplace or outside the hospital. They came up with different thoughts i.e. introduction to phone triage and virtual clinics; improved infection control awareness; staff encouragement for positive workplace gestures; healthcare workers offered to work extra hours if required. Moreover, people noticed positivity in routine life in-terms of priority shopping for healthcare workers, more family time and more time for hobbies.

Frontline professionals who are exposed to a stressful environment are more vulnerable to experience varied emotional and behavioural responses. Therefore, counselling and psychotherapy based on the stress-adaptation model may function as instant and prompt intervention. Mindfulness-based stress management approaches are generally considered effective in relatively low to medium levels of stress. For the control of pandemic, it is significant to address the mental health issues in medical workers³. In summary, an effort was put in place locally at Midlands Regional Hospital Portlaoise to counteract the psychological stress triggered by Covid-19. It is possible that similar programmes may be helpful at other healthcare facilities.

Corresponding Author:

Dr Muhammad Tariq MBBS,DCH, MRCPI,FRCPCH,FRCPI,
Adjunct Senior Clinical Lecturer University of Limerick,
Limerick,
Ireland
Email: muhammad.tariq4@hse.ie

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