

Supporting medical centre staff



Tips for supporting medical centre staff

Staff working in the medical centre are likely to be personally affected by the disaster and have personal connections to many of the patients accessing the clinic. You and your staff may experience strong feelings of fear, sadness, guilt, anger, grief or symptoms of burnout. Many staff may be highly motivated to help others and feel the need to be strong for others. This can lead to a neglect of their own self-care and a reluctance to seek support themselves. If you are a manager or senior staff member, this fact sheet will provide you with some strategies that you can use to help support your staff.

What staff might be experiencing

Most people who have experienced a natural disaster will go through times when they find things difficult or challenging, and it is important to understand what your staff may be experiencing. Emotional stress, physical injury, grief, and disruption of normal routines may limit the availability and energy of your work group. At the same time, the group may face new responsibilities — caring for others and facilitating community recovery.

Over time, working to support people who are experiencing elevated distress, fear, anger or agitation may start to leave your staff feeling the effects of burnout.

The impacts of burnout can include:

- feeling on guard, having difficulty calming down or difficulty falling asleep
- feeling overwhelmed or exhausted
- avoidance around self-care or socialising with friends and family
- feeling cynical or detached from work
- feeling a sense of ineffectiveness or lack of accomplishment
- increased feelings of anxiety, agitation/irritability, anger, numbness.



Tips for supporting staff

- Ensure rostering and workloads are reasonable, and don't over extend any one individual or team.
- Facilitate regular team meetings to enhance team cohesion, discuss challenges, provide information, and informally assess staff wellbeing.
- Model good self-care, including adequate sleep, hydration, nutrition, stress management, exercise and work-life balance.
- Encourage breaks and take breaks yourself.
- Facilitate positive activities in the workplace to facilitate connection and bolster morale (e.g., staff morning teas, lunchtime walking groups, yoga class, BBQ lunch).
- Create a workplace atmosphere where it is ok and acceptable to ask for help/support when individuals may be having difficulty coping.
- Invite a guest speaker to address staff about Self Care and Professional Burnout.
- Be aware of staff exposure to distressed patients or disturbing news in the community (i.e., suicides). Directly acknowledge and validate the situation and respond supportively to grief and stress reactions. Reinforce avenues for support.
- Provide frequent and direct communication to all staff. Good communication builds trust and decreases rumours. Use effective communication strategies: say what is known and unknown, commit to getting answers when there is uncertainty, follow through on promises, avoid false reassurances, and provide the truth.
- Ensure younger or less experienced staff have access to more experienced staff to discuss their work, as this group are more vulnerable to burnout/fatigue.
- Look out for signs of burnout/fatigue in staff members (e.g., increased sick days, withdrawal from peers, appearing fatigued, increased use of substances – caffeine, nicotine and alcohol).
- Monitor staff who have identified difficulty in coping. Provide referral to appropriate professional services as required (such as an EAP).

For more information visit the Disaster Mental Health Hub at phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub