COPING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT DURING A PANDEMIC

HELPING NURSING HOME STAFF BUILD RESILIENCY TO ADDRESS COVID-19 RELATED STRESSORS

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May 2020
THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY COPING AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

- During the Covid-19 Pandemic, healthcare workers in Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) staff are at increased risk for emotional distress.

- This is a result of the unique challenges of being a healthcare worker during this unprecedented and highly stressful situation.

- Increased stress and negative emotions are normal responses to abnormal circumstances.
WHAT ARE THE STRESSORS RELATED TO COVID-19 IN SNFS

- Fear of contracting Covid-19
- Fear of spreading the virus to others at home
- Fear of infecting patients
- Limited resources/supplies
- Proper use of PPE and infection control protocols
- Feeling misunderstood by family and friends, feeling you have to justify work
- A sense of a lack of appreciation (versus focus on hospital workers)
- Negative news associated with nursing homes and Covid-19
- Change in workflow and responsibility; change in units; change in colleagues
WHAT ARE THE STRESSORS RELATED TO COVID-19 IN SNFS

- Death of patients
- Death of coworkers
- Pressure to keep our vulnerable patients safe
- Increased work hours, demands, and fatigue
- Increased patient distress, challenging behaviors, attention-seeking behaviors
- There is no clear end in site AND things can change daily

Plus general Covid-19 outbreak stressors!
Most people are resilient and will weather this storm with no lasting significant mental health symptoms.

However, based on past disaster research, 10%-20% of HC workers are at risk for a new mental health disorder they did not have before the Pandemic.

Current limited data suggest a spike in acute emotional distress related to Pandemic related stressors – early studies in Wuhan China (Lai, et. Al. 2020).

Rx in the U.S. for sleep medications, antianxiety, and antidepressants rose 21% between Feb 15 – March 15; 78% new prescriptions.
PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS DURING AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Kaiser Family Foundation poll: 56% reported that worry/stress related to the Covid-19 outbreak has led to at least one negative mental health effect:

- Trouble with eating or sleeping; Drinking more alcohol; Frequent headaches or stomachaches; Shorter tempers; Etc.

64% of frontline health care workers and their families reported worsened mental health since the outbreak.

Calls to National Crisis Hotlines have increased

Calls to the Sacramento crisis line increased 40% from February to March

In a year-to-year comparison, April's call volume was 58% greater than in April 2019.
Increased risk for relapse or exacerbation of symptoms in those with previous MH disorders (PTSD, chronic depression, etc.)

Some people experience delayed onset of symptoms – even after the crisis

While symptoms lessen over time, for those with severe symptoms, they may last a long time (SARS studies)

Most likely to see a risk for family discord, difficulties at work, increased substance abuse, etc.
HOW TO COPE AND BE RESILIENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Know
• Know your stress indicators – acknowledge when you are stressed so you can make a conscious choice to cope

Consider
• Consider your personal coping strategies

Encourage
• Encourage adaptability and flexibility

Tap
• Tap into social support

Promote
• Promote healthy thinking and positive attitudes

Engage in
• Engage in healthy behaviors (sleep, eating, exercise)

Practice
• Practice relaxation
WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension

Indicators of stress:

- **Physical**: muscle tension, fatigue, upset stomach
- **Emotional**: anxious, sad/depressed, worrying, irritable
- **Cognitive**: negative thinking (catastrophizing), difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- **Behavioral**: impulsivity, snapping at others, withdrawal, increased substance use
Good stress management improves your resilience to hold up under pressure and successfully manage challenges.

Stress Management is not a “one size fits all” process.

Identify what positive coping tools work for you.

PLAN how you will respond to stress during the pandemic and as stressors occur.
CONSIDER WHAT POSITIVE COPING SKILLS DO YOU ALREADY USE?

- Listening to music
- Taking a walk
- Journaling/writing
- Reading
- Doing a puzzle
- Games on your phone
- Yoga/exercise
- Socializing (from afar)
- Engage in a hobby
- Cooking/baking
- Cleaning/organizing
- Having a cup of tea
COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limit</th>
<th>Limit media consumption</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remind</td>
<td>Remind yourself of the positive work you are doing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Say</td>
<td>Say your gratitude list daily/keep a gratitude journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take</td>
<td>Take more breaks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend</td>
<td>Spend time outdoors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Download</td>
<td>Download COVID Coach App</td>
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COVID COACH APP: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Education about coping during the pandemic
- Tools for self-care and to improve emotional well-being
- Trackers to check your mood and measure your growth toward personal goals
ACCEPT THE THINGS YOU CANNOT CHANGE

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable
- Many things in life are beyond our control
- Focus on the things you can control
Stressful situations often require us to be flexible
- The Covid-19 Pandemic is no exception

Flexibility and adaptability play important roles in an individual’s ability to adapt to continuously changing environments

People who are flexible cope with stress better and have less negative affect
SOCIAL SUPPORT: CONNECT WITH OTHERS

- Social support is consistently found in research to buffer the effects of stress, including during “disasters”

- Because of social distancing and quarantine requirements, this is more challenging

  - Consider ways to stay connected socially during social distancing:
    - Reach out to a colleague at work
    - Ask a loved one to check in with you
    - Call or email an old friend
    - Go for a walk (at safe distance) with a colleague during breaks
    - Schedule zoom and other app get togethers
    - Facetime with loved ones
    - Confide in a faith leader
DEVELOP HEALTHY THINKING

Pay attention to what you are thinking

Many thoughts are not accurate, realistic, or helpful

Thoughts are NOT facts

When stressed, individuals may have more Negative Automatic Thoughts:

• Catastrophize
• Overgeneralize
• Have a “Negative Filter”
“Everyone will get sick, overwhelm my work, and I won’t be able to bear the burden.”

“I only worked 12 hours but everyone else worked more than that. I never do enough.”

“I know I’ll get sick even though I am using PPE and following all safety precautions.”

“If I take time to rest, I would be selfish and put others at-risk.”

“A patient was hospitalized and placed on a ventilator because I didn’t do enough. It’s my fault if the patient dies.”

“If I take a break, others will think I’m shirking my responsibilities and criticize me.”

NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS  (EXCERPT ADAPTED FROM: ARNOLD, K.D. & SKILLINGS, J.L., 2020)
Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)

What evidence is there?
How would someone else see this?
What advice would I give someone else?
Is there another way of looking at this?
Is this fact or opinion?
Is this thought helpful?

Question and Challenge those Automatic Negative Thoughts

Identify those Automatic Negative Thoughts

Come up with more realistic and optimistic thoughts
POSITIVE “SELF-TALK”

- "I can cope with my anxiety."
- "I can problem solve and prepare for upcoming events."
- "I know ways to cope with stress and use them effectively."

At a minimum: Change self-limiting statements to questions

- I can’t do this! --- How can I do this?
- This is impossible! --- How is this possible?
Gratitude is an awareness of the good things in one’s life and being thankful.

Gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness.

In research studies, self-guided weekly or daily gratitude exercises were associated with higher levels of positive affect.

How to practice gratitude:
- Gratitude journal
- Daily gratitude mental list
- Say thank you/write a thank you card
WORRY LESS

- 10 Minutes is usually plenty of time to worry
- Schedule “worry time” and set a timer
- Then stop the worry, as it is counterproductive
- When considering a stressor, use time for planning, and coping
INCREASE HEALTHY HABITS

Eat a healthy diet
Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat

Exercise
Consider even brief opportunities for physical activity, such as brief walks, stretches, etc.

Get enough sleep
Adequate sleep improves mood and stress management
Feeling tired limits your stress management capabilities and may reduce your thinking skills and emotional regulation
MAKE TIME FOR REST AND RELAXATION

If you regularly make time for rest and relaxation, you’ll be in a better place to handle life’s stressors.

You may need to be creative during the pandemic.

Set aside time to rest

Include breaks and rest time in your daily schedule

This helps you “recharge your batteries”

Identify activities that help you feel more relaxed

E.g. Have a cup of tea, take a bath, light a candle, practice relaxation exercise, etc.
HAND MODEL OF THE BRAIN

BY DR. DANIEL SIEGEL
WHAT IS “RELAXATION?”

Definition of ‘relaxation:’
- Refreshment of mind or body

Definition of ‘relax:’
- To make less tense
- To release the effects of stress
- To release oneself from worry
WHY PRACTICE RELAXATION TECHNIQUES?

- Reduce anxiety, anger/irritability, negative affect
- Prevents stress from building up
- Decrease muscle tension
- Helps reduce headaches or other physical complaints
- Improves concentration and memory
- Helps sleep
RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Guided Breathing
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Guided Imagery
- Mindfulness Meditations
- Others

https://vimeo.com/402344226
SIMPLE VISUALIZATIONS
WHEN SHOULD I SEEK HELP?

- If you feel initial symptoms of stress are not getting better
- If you feel your current coping skills are not enough
- ***When functioning is impaired (at work, at home, in relationships)***
SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Persistent worry or feeling overwhelmed by emotions
- Excessive worry about a number of concerns and/or a general sense that something bad is going to happen.
- Restlessness
- Irritability; feeling on edge
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep problems
SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- A lack of interest and pleasure in daily activities
- Change in appetite; significant weight loss or gain
- Difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping
- Lack of energy; chronic fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and/or helplessness
- Excessive guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide
WHERE DO I GET HELP?

You are not alone!

- Professional therapy – seek out a psychologist, counselor, other mental health therapist
  - Psychology Today – Find a Therapist; Find a Psychiatrist
  - American Psychological Association – Provider Locator
  - Behavioral Health Providers listing in your health insurance “Find a Provider”
  - Ask your Primary Care Physician for a referral
  - Ask your faith leader for a referral
  - CHE Behavioral Health Services – Outpatient Telehealth Psychotherapy – with licensed psychologists
Welcome to Telehealth Services

For convenient access to high-quality healthcare, people across the country have connected with CHE Behavioral Health. Members can resolve healthcare needs through scheduled visits with licensed behavioral health specialists using our HIPAA SECURE solution. Around the world, people need greater access to high-quality mental healthcare. Our mental health services range from ongoing visits with a mental healthcare specialist to expert medical opinions for complex cases.
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(800) 273-8255

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(Spanish)
(888) 628-9454

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(Options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing)
(800) 799-4889

Crisis Text Line
Text HELLO to 741741


Express Scripts data reported in Brooks, M. COVID-19: Striking Uptick in Anxiety, Other Psych Meds, 4/17/20, MedScape Pharmacy


THANK YOU!

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