Mental Health of Front Line Providers during COVID Outbreak

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Outline

Psychosocial Impact of a Pandemic
Strategies to Support Mental Health in the Time of COVID-19
Personal Considerations
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Psychosocial Impact of a Pandemic

Ripple effect across society

Economic downturn
Social disruptions
Employment concerns
Childcare/elder care (family)

Significant stressors on top of a health crisis
Implications for widespread mental health concerns
Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the Time of COVID-19

• Empower yourself – you are psychologically well-equipped for this challenge

• In a crisis, it can be challenging to learn and practice new emotion regulation skills

• ED personnel are already quite adept at managing crises large and small

• You have an impressive arsenal of stress management skills
Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the Time of COVID-19

- You have an impressive arsenal of stress management skills

- Data from past crises (9/11, epidemics, Hurricane Katrina) suggest most healthcare workers will experience temporary increase in stress/anxiety, and a smaller percentage will experience clinically significant elevations in symptoms
  - We can practice skills now that can mitigate risk to our mental health later
  - We are resilient, brains are malleable
Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Identify and practice those skills that worked during past struggles
- Take a moment now to remind yourself what was most effective
  - Leaning on friends/family for support, your therapist, meditation, exercise, cooking, reading, yoga, affirmations, religion/spirituality?
  - Jot down a list of at least 3-5 concrete tools that are helpful to YOU as a person
  - Keep the list handy or take a picture of it on your phone so you can refer to it quickly instead of having to generate it in the midst of panic
Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

Utilize “growth mindset” vs fixed mindset

• Fixed mindset – innate, unchangeable

• Growth mindset – through personal effort and practice, we can learn new ways of being (by practicing cognitive flexibility or resilience skills, I can become less anxious/depressed in the face of crises)
Strategies to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Research suggests a buffering factor during times of crisis is “psychological resilience” or flexibility
  - Set of mental traits and abilities that reduces impact of trauma on wellbeing
  - These are skills that can be taught and built with practice like a muscle

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
  - Evidence based treatment
  - Part of cognitive behavioral therapies
  - Very effective set of skills for coping with challenges outside of our control like pandemics or the experiences commonly shared by ED staff
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

“one of our greatest freedoms is how we react to things”
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Values

Values are like cardinal directions, not trophies to put on the shelf

Remind yourself why you chose this field
Likely out of a desire to care for others and to assist those in need
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Values

• Spend some time reflecting on your values & how they relate to your chosen field

• What are you being called to do during this pandemic and how does that relate to your core values?

• Be intentional in choosing to act in accordance with those values as you face crises, moment-to-moment
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19 - Defusion

• Noticing thoughts as thoughts (passing mental phenomena), rather than facts or mandates for behavior

• “There goes my brain telling me the story again that…”
  – Typically “…I’m not good enough” or “they think I’m stupid”, but during COVID-19, “this will never end”, “I can’t handle any more stress”

• Lemon exercise (power of thoughts); mountain & weather
Cognitive Distortions

Notice thoughts as they function in your life instead of their validity.

Ask: “is that thought helping me move forward in a productive way right now?”
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

• Remember this is unprecedented – it’s okay to not be okay

• Give yourself permission to feel – Radical Acceptance
  – Avoidance of emotions/thoughts tends to make them stronger and harder to manage effectively
  – Approach difficult emotions with curiosity and self-compassion
  – Designate a brief “worry time” each day
    • Jot down difficult thoughts or emotions throughout the day to come back to later during your “worry time”
    • Allows you to compartmentalize and stay productive
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

• Give yourself permission to feel
  – Meaning-finding in the event
    • Out of negative experiences often come valuable changes in our perspectives
    • Reflect: What interesting new people have you met or have touched your life as a result of past challenges? How have challenges changed your perspective?
    • Cultivate gratitude for the challenges we face
    • Process emotions - Journaling, talking with friends/family, debriefing with colleagues, therapy
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

• Coping with uncertainty and lack of control
  – Practice mindful awareness of the here and now
    • **At work:** When external circumstances are difficult to cope with in an ED setting, practice mindful awareness of the self & internal cues
      – Intentionally slowing own breathing
      – Noticing own thoughts and emotions
      – Mindfulness of behaviors toward others, intentional connection with colleagues
    • **At home or on break:** mindful cooking/eating, mindful showering, meditation, intentional connection with loved ones
Mind Full, or Mindful?
ACT to Support your Mental Health in the time of COVID-19

- Coping with uncertainty and lack of control
- Calm your body’s physiological arousal to stress
  - Diaphragmatic Breathing/square breathing
  - Meditation
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Grounding – noticing body in chair, all the blue things in the room, etc
Coping with uncertainty and lack of control

- Manage your media consumption
  - COVID-19 news is everywhere
  - Practice social media distancing to protect mental health
  - Limit to 2x/day for 10 min on 2 news sources (e.g., 9 am and 9pm for 10 min each on your favorite 2 news platforms)
- DO FaceTime/Zoom/call with friends and family regularly to stay connected
Personal Considerations

Communication with others during times of uncertainty
You may be bombarded with questions from family/friends
  Validate their fears; reflect “I hear that you are worried about…”
  Provide clear, concise information
  Limit conversation length
  Practice saying no
Be a Coping Model!

Coping Model = modeling that we all experience anxiety

Emphasizing non-judgmental stance toward self, it’s okay to have difficult feelings

This is effective for patients, but also for children, family members, friends, loved ones
Personal Considerations

– Guilt and worry on the front lines
  • What if I get sick
    – Implications for colleagues AND family
    – Permit yourself that concern, use it to motivate change in behavior (e.g., checking PPE thoroughly, plan for what if scenario) rather than rumination on feelings, then move forward
    – Self-compassion
    – Advocate for self: assertive communication skills to get needs met
GROWING RESILIENCE
Tips to Weather Harsh Seasons
Anna E. Allmann, Ph.D

HOPE
Cultivate optimism. Accept change, be flexible, and remember struggles are transient.

REFLECT
Journal to identify coping skills that were effective in the past. Find meaning in this event and purpose in your role in it.

CULTIVATE GRATITUDE
Savor small positive experiences. Identify 5 things daily for which you are grateful.

CONNECT
Invest meaningfully in your relationships. Practice vulnerability and seek support from trustworthy and compassionate individuals.

PRACTICE MINDFULNESS
Do what centers you. Breathe, meditate, get outside, use your 5 senses to ground yourself. Be aware of unhelpful thought patterns. Redirect rumination to problem solving.

LIVE YOUR VALUES
Remind yourself what is truly important to you, and let that guide your actions. What is one small way you can live your values today?

BE FLEXIBLE
Practice flexibility of mind and behavior by noticing and accepting changes in circumstances and forgoing novel and creative paths forward.

ENGAGE IN SELF CARE
Check in with yourself. Are you getting your basic needs met? Do one pleasurable activity every day.

FORGIVE
Be generous with yourself and others. Difficulties present opportunities for growth, self-discovery, and learning. Be realistic with your expectations.

Research indicates that stressors and adverse life events pose challenges for many people’s mental health. Resilience is a set of traits and skills individuals use to adapt and even thrive during adversity. Growth mindset suggests that with practice, people can grow in resilience. Here are 9 evidence-based methods to improve your coping strategies now.
Resources

CU apps
UCLA mindfulness app
Calm app
Headspace app
Resources
Resources

The Happiness Lab – podcast

Jon Kabat-Zinn – Mindfulness, Healing, and Wisdom during COVID-19 - youtube

Online workouts

Yoga with Adrienne – youtube

Russ Harris’ FACE COVID – youtube

APA.org – Pandemics (large list of variety of resources)

Child Mind Institute – info for talking with kids about COVID
Contact Us

Columbia Doctors Psychiatry
212-305-6001
https://www.columbiadoctors.org/psychiatry-psychology

Cope Columbia
Email Laurel Mayer, MD - lsm16@cumc.columbia.edu

1:1 peer support calls - 646-774-5366 (Evelyn Valentin, Lou Baptista-Neto’s assistant)