Guidance for Practice Managers and Clinical Leaders - The psychological wellbeing of staff during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic presents significant challenges for healthcare staff. Good leadership and management of staff is important in helping staff deal with the psychological demands that are being placed on them. There are some things that can help when managing and leading teams:

- Role-model caring and compassionate leadership
- Being accessible and visible to staff and putting in place mechanisms to communicate regularly
- Assisting staff to identify their concerns and working with them to address them
- Coming together to share experiences, learning and to be together as a team, such as at the beginning and the end of the day
- Developing peer support formally and informally
- Regular supportive supervision for individuals and teams
- Access to a protected space for teams to be together
- Partnering inexperienced workers with experienced workers, such as a buddy system
- Encouraging staff to take breaks, eat, drink and rest and maintain contact with families, friends and colleagues
- Rotating staff from higher stress to lower stress functions where possible. If staff are using PPE, consider whether flexible shift patterns can be created
- Providing additional support for staff who may be more vulnerable
- Checking in with teams about whether the physical environment is adequate and ensuring there is access to food and hydration
- Giving the message that it is okay not to be okay – everyone reacts differently but it is normal to struggle. Don't be afraid to ask, 'are you okay?'

Staff Support

- Encourage staff to reach out to colleagues, family and friends
- Avoid early single session interventions such as critical incident debriefing or rush to provide psychological therapy too soon – this could interfere with people's natural ways of coping
- Signpost to resources such as local chaplaincy services, professional membership organisations, unions, employee assistance programmes and others
- Ensure staff are aware of the following free resources:
    - NHS staff wellbeing support helpline - **0300 131 7000**, available from 7am to 11pm seven days a week. To use the text service text 85258 or click here to find out more
    - A range of NHS wellbeing resources - NHS Wellbeing Resources
    - Advice and tips from Every Mind Matters - click here
    - Help for Heroes have developed a useful resource for health and care staff – A Field Guide to Self-Care
    - Advice and tips from international experts for you and your teams - MindEd

- Free resources available to Doctors:
    - BMA wellbeing support - 24 hour support line and peer support service (also available to medical students) - click here
    - NHS Practitioner Health Service - supports practitioners with mental or physical problems including addiction - click here
    - GP Health Service call 030003003 300 or email prac.health@nhs.net
    - MPS members can access 6 free counselling sessions call 0800 1894385
- Although it is normal for staff to find what is happening emotionally difficult, look out for signs of burnout such as feeling emotionally exhausted, tearful, overwhelmed or flat – these feelings should be a cue for staff to get help and workplace support
- Most staff members won't require formal psychological interventions. However, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop in some staff who have been exposed to very stressful, traumatic or frightening experiences when delivering care to patients. Symptoms include reliving what has happened through vivid dreams and flashbacks, feeling very anxious, angry, irritable and guilty. Some people will feel low in mood, have trouble sleeping and have physical symptoms. For many people these symptoms will improve over time, but if they don't improve after one month, staff can be referred or self-refer for psychological therapy. Services will also work with people experiencing depression and anxiety – Find an IAPT Service.

The Kings Fund have produced a useful ideographic on responding to stress experienced by staff - https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/rapid-guidance-stress-diagram.pdf

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