

Managing the Impact of COVID-19 as a Healthcare Worker

Service-oriented professions, such as healthcare workers and first responders, are the essential workers on the front lines as the world deals with COVID-19. We understand, serving your communities has been and continues to be your priority and you are needed more than ever during this health crisis. Your own well-being may be taking a back seat so you can focus on caring for others. How you practice self-care will determine your ability to be present, effective and helpful both now and for the long haul. You need to effectively manage the emotional and physical impact of your service at this challenging time. The steps you take to make yourself more resilient will determine your ability to care for those who need your care. We have put together the below suggestions to assist you in this journey. Please do not hesitate to contact your EAP, Personal Assistance Services, if you need additional guidance and suggestions. Our counselors are available 24/7/365 at (800) 356-0845.

Is what I am feeling normal?

This is one of the most common questions asked among those feeling overwhelmed. Each person uniquely handles their experiences in their own way. Feeling Irritable, angry, anxious, sad and fearful are common responses. You may also find that previously managed mental health conditions like depression or anxiety may be more difficult to manage when under stress. The current circumstances are not typical, and you may be asked to do things you've never done before or make decisions you don't normally make, which can also prompt these responses. Recurrent or constant adrenaline release from cumulative stress may cause changes in sleep patterns, mood, appetite and energy level. Rest assured, these responses are common, but need to be managed and monitored so they don't impact your ability to focus and function.

Focus on what you can control

You cannot control how many patients seek service or service calls that need a response, but you can change your focus to what you can control, namely how you address your body's response. Feeling stressed or anxious, especially at this time, does not mean you are in the wrong role or profession. It is your body telling you it needs attention. Listen to it and respond by giving it what it needs. Water, a break, food, friendship, family and sleep are the most common needs we have when we are stretched thin. Virtual support from friends, family and colleagues is better than no support at all! Be present when you are speaking with them and appreciate the happiness you feel in their presence.

Monitor compassion fatigue

One of the biggest challenges for healthcare workers, first responders and others in service industries is monitoring and managing compassion fatigue. When workers devote their time and energy to helping others who need them, they are tapping into their own personal energy reserves. When overwhelming sadness, exhaustion and fatigue set in and coping skills are not as effective as they usually are, compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue are out of balance. Know the signs of compassion fatigue and address them to aid in a quicker recovery. Below are symptoms to monitor:

- Flashbacks or nightmares about emotionally charged or traumatic events
- Feeling cynical and/or hopeless about your job or profession
- Overwhelming preoccupation with a particular patient or individual or case
- Mood swings
- Inability to manage previously managed mental health symptoms

- Difficulty functioning or performing daily tasks
- Emotional withdrawal from relationships
- Work performance issues

If you question your ability to recognize and/or recover from compassion fatigue, don't panic. Rediscovering balance and focusing on rejuvenation will help you get back on track. If you need assistance or guidance, please contact your EAP, Personal Assistance Services, at (800) 356-0845 for free and confidential assistance 24/7/365.

Address the short term and plan for the long term

Compassion fatigue, anxiety and stress prompted by the pandemic are further exacerbated by the uncertainty around how long the pandemic will last. Addressing the short term and planning for the long term allows you to spread your resilience over time.

Short term strategies and tools:

- Take stress management breaks and use brief relaxation techniques
- Take time-outs to rehydrate and nourish your body
- Engage in positive self-talk
- Get physically active, such as taking a walk
- Limit excessive sweets and caffeine
- Avoid negative coping strategies like alcohol or overuse of prescriptions
- Celebrate and share your accomplishments and ask your peers to share theirs with you,
- Limit exposure to media,
- Keep a regular sleep schedule as much as possible,
- Maintain routines as much as possible

Long term strategies and focus:

- Accept situations you cannot change
- Be patient with yourself and others
- Monitor your own well-being by asking yourself "how am I doing?"
- Acknowledge and seek assistance when what you are doing doesn't feel effective or beneficial
- Don't overschedule shifts or obligations, even virtually
- Keep regular contact with friends, family and positive individuals in your life
- Re-charge your energies after each shift (physical, emotional and spiritual)
- Acknowledge things/people you are grateful for each day.

If you have healthy self-care behaviors and activities that you have practiced successfully in the past, continue doing them or re-introduce them, if possible. No sense in re-inventing the wheel if you already know what works!

You are to be commended and appreciated for the services you provide daily. People aspire to be like you. By modeling resilience and self-care, you are rewarding yourself for your dedication and hard work and modeling for your colleagues, family and a new generation how they can be successful and healthy every day and in a health crisis!

PAS has the knowledge, tools, and resources to help. Don't hesitate to contact us for assistance and information 24/7/365 at (800) 356-0845.