



SUPPORT FOR NURSES AND AIDES

“Very few first responders will take initiative to seek out behavioral health care on a normal day. Throw in an ongoing disaster, and that number drops to zero” (SAMSHA, 2018).

This year, nurses and aides have found themselves front and center, caring for others in the most challenging of conditions. A recent article in the *Journal of Clinical Nursing* describes the hurdles nurses face during the pandemic. The authors offer suggestions for boosting nurse and nurse teams’ mental and emotional health. We summarize essential highlights to help you stay informed.

Cultivate your well-being as often as possible

Prioritize your needs, such as food, water, rest, and relaxation whenever you can. At this point, the nursing staff tends to be more interested in alleviating worries at home, acquiring regular rest, PPE, and additional training for clients’ anxiety.

Peer to Peer Support

Nurses are pre-wired to look after others. Taking the time for self-care may not come naturally. It’s vital to buddy up with a peer who will check in on you, and vice versa. Peers, friends, and managers are uniquely qualified to check in on one another. Initially, keep the conversation casual to help with trust. Frequent check-ins with sincere inquiry may circumvent the stigma of asking for help. Some examples include offering your buddy food or water or encouraging a break. Listen, nonjudgmentally, and offer to help come up with solutions to issues, together, that your buddy is facing. Remind them that they are safe in the present moment.

Bolstering Teams

All team members need support. Some nurses are just returning to work. In many states, temporary laws passed to encourage nursing students to provide clinical services. While it makes sense to pair up with the newest staff, it’s essential to furnish support for all levels. According to Maben & Bridges (2020), “managerial support and resourcing should be provided so that buddying is not seen as an easy way out for organizations meaning they are not providing adequate psychological or other support.” Also, research backs mid-shift check-ins as a way to provide additional emotional support.

Managers and Leaders

Research on armed forces members demonstrates that team cohesion between peers and leadership is highly correlated with positive mental health outcomes. Leadership can enhance communication through daily emails that include clear and transparent status updates. Managers can decrease stigma by initiating conversations concerning warning signs of mental health deterioration. Reducing the shift-length or reorganizing schedules can support staff interaction with family members and non-work support systems. From a business aspect, the elimination of non-urgent matters may alleviate stress for nurses and aides.

The long view

While the anxieties that surface in the face of this pandemic should not be pathologized, it’s necessary for nurses to feel heard and supported. Individuals, peers, management, and leaders play an essential role in the wellbeing of their peers and teams. Staying present and understanding when to intervene are practices that will serve and strengthen staff. The authors poignantly assert, “resilience must never be seen as an individual responsibility; it is a collective and organizational responsibility” (Maben & Bridges, 2020).

References

Maben, J., & Bridges, J. (2020). *Covid-19: Supporting nurses’ psychological and mental health*. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. doi: 10.1111/jocn.15307

SAMSHA. (2018). *Disaster Technical Assistance Center Supplemental Research Bulletin*. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>