FOR OUR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

* Feeling under pressure is a likely experience for you and many of your colleagues. It is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak. Managing your mental health and psychosocial well-being during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
* Take care of yourself at this time. Try and use helpful coping strategies such as ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical well-being. The COVID-19 outbreak is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using strategies that have worked for you in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. You are the person most likely to know how you can de-stress and you should not be hesitant in keeping yourself psychologically well. This is not a sprint; it’s a marathon.
* Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community owing to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones, including through digital methods, is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support – your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.
* Use understandable ways to share messages with people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities. Where possible, include forms of communication that do not rely solely on written information.
* Know how to provide support to people who are affected by COVID-19 and know how to link them with available resources. This is especially important for those who require mental health and psychosocial support. The stigma associated with mental health problems may cause reluctance to seek support for both COVID-19 and mental health conditions. The mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide includes clinical guidance for addressing priority mental health conditions and is designed for use by general healthcare workers.

FOR TEAM LEADERS OR MANAGERS IN HEALTH FACILITIES

* Keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this response means that they will have a better capacity to fulfil their roles. Be sure to keep in mind that the current situation will not go away overnight and you should focus on longer-term occupational capacity rather than repeated short-term crisis responses.
* Ensure that good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from higher-stress to lower-stress functions. Partner inexperienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. The buddy system helps to provide support, monitor stress and reinforce safety procedures. Ensure that outreach personnel enter the community in pairs. Initiate, encourage and monitor work breaks. Implement flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted or have a family member affected by a stressful event. Ensure that you build in time for colleagues to provide social support to each other.
* Ensure that staff are aware of where and how they can access mental health and psychosocial support services and facilitate access to such services. Managers and team leaders are facing similar stresses to their staff and may experience additional pressure relating to the responsibilities of their role. It is important that the above provisions and strategies are in place for both workers and managers, and that managers can be role-models for self-care strategies to mitigate stress.
* Orient all responders, including nurses, ambulance drivers, volunteers, case identifiers, teachers and community leaders and workers in quarantine sites, on how to provide basic emotional and practical support to affected people using psychological first aid.
* Manage urgent mental health and neurological complaints (e.g. delirium, psychosis, severe anxiety or depression) within emergency or general healthcare facilities. Appropriate trained and qualified staff may need to be deployed to these locations when time permits, and the capacity of general healthcare staff capacity to provide mental health and psychosocial support should be increased (see the mhGAP Humanitarian Intervention Guide).
* Ensure availability of essential, generic psychotropic medications at all levels of health care. People living with long-term mental health conditions or epileptic seizures will need uninterrupted access to their medication, and sudden discontinuation should be avoided.

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