

Five Key Ways to Support Health Care Workers in the Midst of Crisis



1 Foster open and transparent communication to build trust, reduce fears, build morale, and sustain an effective workforce.

- Share with employees the challenges facing the organization.
- Ask employees for ideas on how to manage problems.
- Recognize employees' heroic efforts.
- Acknowledge that there's fear, anxiety, and frustration.
- Listen, and show your own vulnerability and emotion.



Idea: Send a daily or weekly email on changes that have been implemented, patient intake, community epidemiologic data, and current levels of critical equipment and supplies.



2 Remove barriers to health care workers seeking mental health services and develop systems that support institutional, as well as individual resilience.

- Eliminate policies that reinforce fear of the professional consequences of seeking mental health treatment.
- Refer “second victims” of the crisis to an employee assistance program or off-site provider.
- Implement flexible scheduling options, and transparent sick and return-to-work policies.
- Monitor how much time each employee is working in high-risk or stressful situations.
- Limit nonessential emails, calls and staff requirements for those working in crisis situations.
- Offer self-care activities, such as meditation, prayer, quiet time, and human-to-human contact.



Idea: Provide free hotel rooms to help eliminate the need for daily commutes, promote rest, and reduce exposure to family members.

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3 Protect workers' safety using the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety Hierarchy of Controls framework.

- Reduce the risk of exposure to workplace hazards, including COVID-19, using the five levels of control – elimination, substitution, [engineering controls](#), administrative controls, and personal protective equipment.
- Check staff for COVID-19 symptoms prior to their shift.
- Require staff to wear masks in all areas of the organization, including break rooms and lunchrooms.

Joint Commission Resources' COVID-19 Recovery Preparation Assessment Checklist.

4 Develop a flexible workforce; evaluate the work being performed and determine if it can be performed remotely.

- Implement telehealth, which enables staff to work while in quarantine.
- Continually develop team members who can contribute within intensive care settings.

5 Provide clinicians and others with opportunities to collaborate, lead and innovate.

- Have clinicians work with individuals in traditional leadership roles (such as CMOs, CNOs, hospital epidemiologists) to make agile and informed decisions.
- Build flexibility and resiliency into clinical staffing plans to establish multidisciplinary teams to organize surge preparation and response. Review and revise as needed.

Innovation and transformation in the response to COVID-10: Seven areas where clinicians need to lead. *New England Journal of Medicine Catalyst*, April 16, 2020.

For more information, see *Sentinel Event Alert* Issue 62, “Voices from the Pandemic: Health Care Workers in the Midst of Crisis.”