

KEEPING YOURSELF HEALTHY: RESILIENCE AND STRESS INOCULATION DURING COVID-19

During an infectious disease outbreak such as COVID-19, you as a physician will encounter heightened stress and challenges. Over time, stress, fatigue, worry or anxiety related to COVID-19 may arise and impact whether you feel your best self.

Many workplace and environmental factors (limited disease knowledge, resource allocation and coordination, international factors) are beyond your control. The good news is, physician resilience remains the common and natural response to uncommon stress and adversity.

Resilience-promoting steps

Resilience is not a DIY project or just about overcoming adversity – it is about being engaged in life and experiencing meaningful relationships within a caring community. Below are a series of practical steps intended to help you to monitor and support your own and your colleagues' wellbeing and resilience.

1. The basics matter – rest(oration), nutrition, exercise, social support plus trusted sources of information are the foundation for optimal and sustainable performance.
2. Develop systems of timely updates regarding clinical care, safety and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 and include a process to track questions, concerns and issues. For timely and current information go to www.oma.org.
3. Social distancing or self-isolation doesn't mean social isolation. Stay connected (phone, text, Facetime) with those in your network of trusted, caring friends, family, and colleagues.
 - At work, have a buddy system, daily huddles or check-ins in-person or by video conferencing
 - Have back up plans in place for family, children, elderly relatives or pets, if you or loved ones cannot attend to usual support roles or caring activities, including preparing of the possibility of self/family isolation.
 - If a colleague requires self/family isolation, develop a system to maintain contact and provide practical support.
 - Find more information on self-isolation here: [Public Health Ontario - COVID-19 Resources](#)
4. There are many healthy habits and professional skills that you already know and use. Notice when your coping skills are useful, depleted, or a mismatch for a specific challenge.
 - Circumstances like COVID-19 may reawaken or connect to other past issues. Reminders from the past can be common so it is helpful to focus on current information while being gentle with oneself.
 - Self-reflection is a positive mental skill – rumination or persistent worry, not so much.
 - Watch Dr. Robert Maunder and Dr. Jon Hunter's [7-minute video](#) "Three steps to coping with anything (including COVID-19)"

5. Have people in your life who will respectfully let you know when you are not at your best and encourage and accept offers of support.
6. Notice and address stigma and bias arising from the outbreak.
 - Those who are ill, exposed to ill patients and/or quarantined have higher risk of being stigmatized.
 - Do – talk about “people who have COVID-19” or people “acquiring” or “contracting” COVID-19.
 - Don’t – refer to people with the disease as “COVID-19 cases” or “victims”.
 - Don’t – talk about people “infecting others” or “spreading the virus” as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame.
7. Promote psychological safety and organizational fairness, especially when resources, workloads and values are stretched.
 - Trust and fairness among colleagues decrease worry and increases engagement.
 - Make it comfortable for colleagues and team members to ask questions.
 - Fairness includes monitoring and, as possible, moderating the exposure, intensity and duration of high-risk work.
8. Help colleagues to reframe blame. Under pressure, blame and criticism may arise and hinder constructive feedback, problem solving, accountability and team performance.
9. Peer support networks and programs foster a culture of wellness by building cohesion, normalizing common concerns and stress reactions, and offering referrals to additional resources.
10. Relationships may become strained under high stress conditions. Understanding, compassion, and goodwill go a long way when interpersonal tensions arise.

More Information and Support

Practicing as a physician is deeply rewarding, but at times it is difficult and psychologically demanding. You are resilient, work hard and often push yourself to care for your patients. Take care of yourself and each other as colleagues. Resilience is optimized by participating in community of care and support including an openness to professional support. For confidential support or more information on COVID-19 psychosocial support:

Physician Health Program
Confidential Toll Free: 1-866-851-6606
Email: php@oma.org