



UWS Academic Portal

COVID-19

Lusher, Joanne; Collins, Graham; Chapman-Jones, David

Published in:
Nursing Management (Harrow, London, England : 1994)

Published: 12/05/2020

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Lusher, J., Collins, G., & Chapman-Jones, D. (2020). COVID-19: psychological support for healthcare workers during and after the pandemic. *Nursing Management (Harrow, London, England : 1994)*.
<https://rcni.com/nursing-management/opinion/comment/covid-19-psychological-support-healthcare-workers-during-and-after-pandemic-160991>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact pure@uws.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Try the RCNi premium digital package for just £1

Nursing Management

COMMENT

COVID-19: psychological support for healthcare workers during and after the pandemic

Joanne Lusher

Graham Collins

David Chapman-Jones

Posted 12 May 2020 - 14:46



Three experts in their field reflect on the psychological well-being of those healthcare workers carrying on their day-to-day work during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond



Picture: iStock

Switching on the news is enough to demonstrate how COVID-19 has produced a devastating and perhaps permanent negative effect on the global economy, the lives of individuals and society as we know it. Throughout the pandemic, a key [message from the UK government has been that we must protect our NHS](#).

However, as well as protecting the sustainability of the NHS and the physical health of its workers, we must also ensure the psychological well-being of healthcare staff.

To illustrate, anecdotal reports point to pressures faced by UK NHS staff who are required to upskill, or reorientate as a response to sudden deployment. Some staff are likely to be undertaking tasks with which they are unfamiliar and for which they have only a basic skill set.

'It is estimated that up to one quarter of ambulance staff experience post-traumatic stress disorder and up to one third experience mental health issues as a result of COVID-19'

Our view is that it is also questionable how healthcare staff will behave when they return to normal practice when this pandemic is over, when the NHS turns its focus again to people with all the other conditions and diseases that didn't mystically disappear during the pandemic.

Furthermore, healthcare workers are also witnessing first-hand the frightening and agonising reality of death that patients undergo in isolation. They are under a tremendous pressure to care for these people with insufficient equipment and suboptimal protection ([Lintern 2020](#)).

Support must extend to non-medical personnel including healthcare workers

Lessons can be learned from early research published on the psychological effects of the pandemic on healthcare workers in Singapore ([Tan et al 2020](#)), which shows that support must

extend to non-medical personnel. This includes for example the healthcare workers who have volunteered to help in a variety of settings such as care homes.

Many of these healthcare staff have minimal training, work in privately owned care homes and have been left largely to fend for themselves. Recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections reveal that more than 1,200 care homes have been classified as 'requiring improvement' or 'inadequate' on more than two consecutive occasions (CQC 2017). This suggests that staff working in these care homes had problems enough before the onset of this COVID-19 pandemic and now face an intolerable work environment that may have a significant psychological effect on them unless there is the infrastructure in place to care adequately for their mental health needs.

A final demonstration of why we must ensure the psychological well-being of all healthcare staff is that it is estimated that up to one quarter of ambulance staff experience post-traumatic stress disorder and up to one third experience mental health issues (Walker and Gerada 2020).

Managing stress associated with the COVID-19 outbreak

In terms of wider strategies already in place to support healthcare workers, Samaritans UK has launched a dedicated phone line for NHS staff designed to offer a non-judgemental listening service so that NHS workers can offload in a safe and confidential environment. Unveiled in April 2020, the NHS-funded scheme is operated by existing Samaritans volunteers, who themselves are in self-isolation and perhaps need their own psychosocial support.

Several recommendations for managing stress associated with the COVID-19 outbreak have been published, but these are generic and do not speak directly to healthcare workers. US guidance (US Department of Veterans Affairs 2020), for example, refers to increasing one's sense of safety (regular handwashing), staying calm (recognising anxiety) and connected (talk to family), and remaining hopeful (gratitude).

'The level of support that could be required in years to come for individuals, particularly those who have worked in healthcare during this pandemic, must not be underestimated, or overlooked'

However, these suggestions are unlikely to lead to a change in mindset because they lack any support in the form of practical tools or exercises that might facilitate any such shift in psychological stance.

Further recommendations for support might be prompted by insights that have been informally shared by nurses reporting panic attacks (Murrell et al 2020).

The public's attitudes to healthcare workers are likely to have changed for the better

As a nation we have been proactive in tackling the palpable psychological stress put on to NHS staff during this pandemic, for example by calling in psychologically prepared and resilient members of the armed forces. Unquestionably a formalised policy to provide an adequate level of psychological support for all healthcare workers is needed to cater for an inevitable future demand.

In a more positive light, we conclude that it is likely that, following this pandemic, the public's attitude towards healthcare workers will have changed for the better, forever. However, this will not ease the psychological burden this coronavirus is likely to have had on healthcare workers.

There is often no obvious cause-effect timeline from trauma to response so the probable detrimental psychological impact of this outbreak on healthcare workers might be delayed. The level of support that could be required in years to come for individuals, particularly those who have worked in healthcare during this pandemic, must not be underestimated, or overlooked, as has

traditionally been the case for our 'highly trained and psychologically resilient' soldiers who have served in wars but never recovered mentally from that service.

[View our COVID-19 resource centre](#)



Joanne Lusher is a health psychologist, and academic and professional lead, Health and Life Sciences London Campus, University of the West of Scotland



Graham Collins is a listening volunteer with Samaritans



David Chapman-Jones is project lead for the Biomedical Research Centre, Zayed Centre for Research into Rare Diseases in Children, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust, London

Find out more

- ▶ [Care Quality Commission \(2017\) CQC to rate more providers following inspection](#)
- ▶ [Lintern S \(2020\) Coronavirus: Doctors and nurses will need PTSD treatment after COVID-19 virus peaks in hospitals, warn health leaders](#)
- ▶ [Murrell A, Lusher J, Mafuva C et al \(2020\) COVID-19 Pandemic and the Surge of Panic Attacks among NHS Nursing Staff: An Ethnographical Perspective. Unpublished report, under review.](#)
- ▶ [US Department of Veterans Affairs \(2020\) Managing Stress Associated with the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak](#)
- ▶ [Tan BYQ, Chew NWS, Lee GKH et al \(2020\) Psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health care workers in Singapore](#)
- ▶ [Walker C, Gerada C \(2020\) Extraordinary times: coping psychologically through the impact of COVID-19](#)

Register for free updates



We have made it easy for you to stay up to date with the latest developments in nursing, including **relevant COVID-19 information**.

Register with us for free – it takes less than a minute – and you'll receive news and updates straight to your inbox.

[Register here today](#)

Advertisement

Receive the latest
COVID-19 updates
 direct to your inbox

**REGISTER FOR OUR
 FREE E-NEWSLETTER**

NursingStandard

Advertisement

 **NOVARTIS**

**COULD YOU RECOGNISE
 SEVERE ASTHMA?**

Refresh your clinical skills
 at the Nurse Severe
 Asthma Learning &
 Resource Centre

FIND OUT MORE >

An educational resource developed and funded by
 Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK Ltd in association with an
 expert panel. February 2019. RES18-R003a



FOR NURSING LEADERS EVERYWHERE

**Nursing
 Management**

RCNI

April 2020 | Volume 27 | Issue 2 | www.nursingmanagement.co.uk

Home truths
 Quality of work-life and
 work-family conflict

Modern challenges
 What do the most successful leaders do?
 Advice on how to succeed in the new world of work

Effective engagement
 How to manage the 'new normal' of
 professional development post

Expert guidance
 120 leading leaders' comments
 made to provide a leadership guide



Vol. 27 issue 2

< Previous

Next >

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIGITAL EDITION

SUBSCRIBE

> CURRENT ISSUE

> PREVIOUS ISSUES

> SIGN UP FOR E-ALERT

> WRITE FOR US

Jobs



Ward Manager

Royston, South Yorkshire, England | £44,802.70 - 44,802.70 per year



Recruiter: Priory Group

[Apply for this job](#)

Ward Manager

Royston, South Yorkshire, England | £44,802.70 - 44,802.70 per year



Related articles

Back to the bedside: our reflections on returning to clinical practice in the pandemic

Volunteer ICU nurses talk teamwork, coping strategies and their families' COVID-19 fears

15 May 2020

COVID-19: how working at the Nightingale has changed my student experience

Two students describe their first weeks in the workplace, and what has helped them cope

15 May 2020

COVID-19: woman who spat at nurse warned she faces prison term

Woman claiming to have COVID-19 had been taken to hospital by police

15 May 2020

What learning disability nurses need to know about Liberty Protection Safeguards

Be prepared for the new legislation covering people lacking mental capacity

15 May 2020

5 Most Read Articles

COVID-19: remembering the nursing staff who have lost their lives

Colleagues and families pay tribute to nursing professionals who have died across the UK

11 May 2020

COVID-19: unions' anger over possible two-year pay freeze for public sector workers

Proposal in leaked Treasury document is 'the exact opposite of what's expected and deserved'

13 May 2020

Boy dies of Kawasaki-like disease linked to coronavirus

Teenager had no co-morbidities but tested positive for COVID-19

13 May 2020

Daughter of nurse who died in pandemic pours scorn on easing of lockdown rules

Don't put nurses' lives at risk of COVID-19, she tells public

14 May 2020

NMC announces further extensions to revalidation deadlines

Registrants due to revalidate later in 2020 can request extension due to COVID-19 pandemic

14 May 2020

Journals

Cancer Nursing Practice

Emergency Nurse

Learning Disability Practice

Mental Health Practice

Nurse Researcher

Nursing Children and Young People

Nursing Management

Nursing Older People

Nursing Standard

Primary Health Care

Other RCNi websites

RCNi Decision Support

RCNi Learning

RCNi Portfolio

RCNi Nurse Awards

RCNi Nursing Careers and Jobs Fairs

RCN Bulletin Jobs

Nursing Management

[About us](#)

[Our editors](#)

[Our editorial advisory board](#)

[Submissions](#)

Nursing Management is published by RCNi, the publishing company of the Royal College of Nursing

RCNi

Contact us

Website information

Opportunities

Follow us

© RCNi 2020

[Back to the top](#)