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Mental health advice for frontline healthcare providers caring for patients with COVID-19

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To the Editor,

Since coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was first reported,¹ anesthesiologists, intensivists, and their healthcare teams have been at the forefront of the fight. Published guidance has focused on the protection of these teams from infection and physical harm.² There is much less information to inform the protection of our teams' psychological well-being. At the best of times, working under pressure in stressful occupations leads to exhaustion. Interventions that minimize fatigue, burnout, and medical error will improve the care of COVID-19 patients and their healthcare providers, alike.³ All healthcare workers must work together to enact effective strategies to promote

psychological well-being.⁴ We base the following suggestions on our experience with COVID-19 in Iran:

- 1) Sleep sufficiently and efficiently. You need rest to recover from today and prepare for tomorrow.
- 2) Eat well, at least three times a day. You need fuel for the long and difficult work ahead. Now more than ever, do not let the day's work make you skip a meal.
- 3) Maintain contact with your colleagues. Working with patients in isolation also isolates their healthcare workers. Share information and personal stories. Care for each other.
- 4) Share decisions with your colleagues. Use their skill, experience, and support to guide you in the challenging diagnostic and therapeutic decisions you will make.
- 5) Constantly update your knowledge. Information regarding COVID-19 grows and evolves rapidly. Develop an information-sharing network with your colleagues. Knowing you are providing the best possible care will ease your stress when patients suffer poor outcomes.
- 6) Maintain contact with your family and friends. They worry about your health as you worry about theirs. Call or video chat regularly to support each other.
- 7) Make time for your hobbies and daily routine. Listen to music, read a book, exercise. It will lend a sense of normalcy to your day and refresh you for your next shift.
- 8) Share your emotions. While patient confidentiality limits sharing the details of your work, you can share how this work made you feel. Sharing the emotional burden of COVID-19 care reduces mental and emotional fragility.

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- 9) Self-care did not begin with COVID-19. You may have struggled with your physical and emotional health before the pandemic. Ensure that you continue to care for these pre-existing conditions in addition to the new challenges posed by COVID-19. Seek help from your primary care physician and your departmental leadership.
 - 10) Get help. Reach out to a mental health professional if you are suffering anxiety, depression, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, or suicidal thoughts. Support a colleague in doing the same.

We hope our experience in Iran helps our colleagues around the world weather the challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

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