

## INTERVENTION 5: Supporting people working in the COVID-19 response

### MESSAGES FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS:

- Feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your colleagues are likely going through; in fact, it is quite normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Workers may feel that they are not doing a good enough job, that there is a high demand on them, and additional new pressures including following strict OSH procedures.
- Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak, even if you feel that way. In fact, stress can be useful. Right now, the feeling of stress may be keeping you going at your job and providing a sense of purpose. Managing your stress and psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
- Take care of your basic needs and employ helpful coping strategies- ensure 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 tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical wellbeing.
- Some workers may unfortunately experience ostracization by their family or community due to stigma. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones 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.
- This is likely a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using the strategies that you have used in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. The strategies to benefit feelings of stress are the same, even if the scenario is different.
- If your stress worsens and you feel overwhelmed, you are not to blame. Everyone experiences stress and copes with it differently. Ongoing and old pressures from your personal life can affect your mental wellbeing in your day

to day job. You may notice changes in how you are working, your mood may change such as increased irritability, feeling low or more anxious, you may feel chronically exhausted or it may feel harder to relax during respite periods, or you may have unexplained physical complaints such as body pain or stomach aches.

- Chronic stress can affect your mental wellbeing and your work and can affect you even after the situation improves. If the stress becomes overwhelming, please approach your lead or the appropriate person to ensure you are provided with appropriate support.

### MESSAGES FOR TEAM LEADERS OR MANAGERS:

If you are a team leader or manager, 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- whether health workers or in allied supporting roles.

- Regularly and supportively monitor your staff for their wellbeing and foster an environment which promotes staff speaking with you if their mental wellbeing worsens.
- Ensure good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. This can help to mitigate any worry about uncertainty that workers have and helps workers to feel a sense of control.
- Consider if there is any capacity to ensure your staff get the rest and recuperation they need. Rest is important for physical and mental wellbeing and this time will allow workers to implement their necessary self-care activities.
- Provide a brief and regular forum to allow workers to express their concerns and ask questions and encourage peer-support amongst colleagues. Without breaking confidentiality, pay particular attention to any staff who you may be aware are experiencing difficulties in their personal life, previously experiencing poor mental health or who are lacking in social support (possibly due to community ostracization).

## INTERVENTION 5:

### Supporting people working in the COVID-19 response (Cont.)

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- Training in PFA can benefit leads/managers and workers in having the skills to provide the necessary support to colleagues.
- Facilitate access to, and ensure staff are aware of where they can access mental health and psychosocial support services, including on-site MHPSS staff if available or telephone-based support or other remote-service options.
- Managers and team leads will face similar stressors as their staff, and potentially additional pressure in the level of responsibility of their role. It is important that the above provisions and strategies are in place for both workers and managers, and that managers are able to role-model self-care strategies to mitigate stress.

### FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK, REFER TO:

WHO. *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak: Rights, roles and responsibilities of health workers, including key considerations for occupational safety and health*. WHO: Geneva, 2020. [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-rights-roles-respon-hw-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=bcabd401\\_0](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-rights-roles-respon-hw-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=bcabd401_0)

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Source: WHO and the International Labour Organization (ILO). *Occupational safety and health in public health emergencies: A manual for protecting health workers and responders*. WHO & ILO: Geneva, 2018.