

Best Practice Guideline Case Study Burnout During a Pandemic



Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the psychological and physical health of many people around the world. Healthcare professionals of all types are treating patients with this disease, including MRTs.¹ Healthcare professionals are faced with the same stressors as all people; however, they have additional stressors associated with increased risk of disease exposure, extreme workloads, moral dilemmas, and a rapidly evolving practice environment.¹ These factors, alongside many others, can lead to increased stress levels and burnout.^{2,3}



A case study on burnout during a pandemic

Amir is a medical radiation technologist working with the emergency department of his local hospital. In caring for his patients and their families, he is often exposed to traumatic and mentally demanding events.

He enjoyed his work greatly before the pandemic, but now Amir is feeling the stress of the uncertainty surrounding this new context. He is worried about protecting his patients, his colleagues, himself, and his family from transmission of the COVID-19 virus. His workplace has a good supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) right now, but he has heard stories from other colleagues who are struggling to access the necessary PPE to prevent transmission. He also worries that his patients may not be able to access necessary procedures in a timely way due to staff shortages and changes to practice. There has been a large drop in the patient caseload, but this changed quickly with an influx. Amir feels like he is working at full capacity all the time and he does not know what to expect from week to week. It is difficult for him to adjust to the continual new protocols and working landscape. He feels disconnected from his colleagues because of the social distancing and PPE requirements and misses their weekly staff lunches, which gave them an opportunity to debrief and relax.

At home, Amir is constantly reading and keeping up with the latest developments regarding the pandemic. He has not found the time to partake in his usual hobbies, and can't go out to play soccer with his team. He is starting to feel exhausted and is losing interest in his work. His family has told him they see a negative change in his demeanour. At work, Amir doesn't feel like he is productive and isn't connecting with his patients as easily.



Reflection

- The three dimensions of burnout are emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.⁴ What is Amir experiencing? Have you experienced how Amir feels or any of the dimensions of burnout?
- What actions can Amir take to positively change his situation?
 - What workplace interventions and supports might be available to him?
 - What can Amir do outside of the workplace that would help him?
 - How can Amir protect himself against pandemic information overload?



Amir's Case Continued

Amir decides to reach out to his manager and explain his situation. The manager listens to his concerns and suggests that Amir use the services available through his organization's employee assistance program (EAP) and/or contact his doctor. The manager expresses their willingness to work with Amir and his care team to address the issue. Amir also finds several resources for front-line workers online and becomes part of a peer support group. This gives him an opportunity to debrief difficult situations, develop coping strategies, and helps him feel less alone and isolated. During one of their video calls, Amir hears other workers talking about the positive impact of Schwartz rounds in their department and brings this up with his management to help their team openly and honestly discuss the issues they are facing in caring for patients during COVID-19.



Strategies to address burnout

Strategies at various levels, from the individual to the organization, are important to holistically address burnout and other mental health concerns and to ensure psychologically healthy workplaces. Figure 1 explores strategies that can be implemented at these various levels, how they are interrelated, and what everyone's responsibilities are to ensure the mental wellbeing of staff.



Figure 1: Interrelationship of strategies at each level to address MRT burnout

Individual MRTs can take action by self-assessing their burnout and acknowledging the emotional impact their work is having on them. They may access available resources from the organization, offer and take part in peer support, and work on their individual coping skills. Leaders or managers in the workplace can help their staff by having open and honest conversations about the emotional impact of the work and its effects on mental health and burnout. The organization should consider offering resources to address the burnout and emotional concerns in the form of workshops, such as training sessions on resiliency. The organization may also distribute available resources through newsletters or initiate peer-support groups.



Reflection

- In your organization, what has been done and what could be done to address burnout of MRTs during the pandemic?
- What are your responsibilities to your workplace and to your co-workers who may be suffering from burnout or stress?
- How can you help destigmatize help-seeking behaviour and change the culture around mental health and burnout in your organization?
- What are your strategies to prevent burnout and address stress during COVID-19?
- How can your manager or supervisor better support you in the workplace with regards to burnout prevention during this time?



More Case Studies on mental health and burnout during COVID-19

Additional, real-life examples of burnout and mental health concerns can be found in the CSMLS Mental Health Toolkit under Faces of Mental Health.

- [Lisette's Story](#)
- [Lorenne's Story](#)

References

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