



Takeaways from MHA Webinar:

Insights from the Frontlines:

Caring for the Caregiver during COVID-19 | April 23, 2020

Overview

During the trying times of today's COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical for health systems to implement robust plans to address the stress the pandemic is having both on clinical and non-clinical staff. In this webinar Thomas Ward, Wellness Program Manager at UMass Memorial Health Care outlines a plan of action to prepare, protect, support, and care for our healthcare workers both during the crisis and beyond through UMass Memorial's COVID-19 Caring for the Caregiver program.

Plan of Action

Crisis Response- "Preparing for the Surge." Below are five principles that should be taken into consideration when developing strategies to support frontline caregivers and staff:

- *Hear me:* Are we, as an organization, addressing principal safety concerns? Communication is a critical part of preparing for the surge. Leadership needs to listen and understand the concerns of staff. This can be done through command center phone lines, emails, regular town hall meetings and feedback channels.
- *Protect me:* How likely is it that members of the staff will contract the virus and spread it to their family? Support staff in reducing the risk of infection and transmission of caregivers through PPE guidance and acquisition and in finding ways to help them keep their families safe, e.g. onsite shower facilities and hotels to stay in
- *Prepare me:* How can we brace caregivers for changes in workflow and being at an increased risk of contracting the virus? It is important to provide training and support with consistent communication and informed decisions. Leveraging transferable skills and multi-channel communications for all staff are examples of how to prepare the frontlines.
- *Support me:* How can we reinforce staff morale and wellbeing with increased demands, increased fatigue and closure of many support systems? Creating resource networks is a great way to support the caregiver. Examples include child care resources, grocery delivery services, meal preparation and wellbeing support.

- *Care for me:* How can we be certain that our frontline staff will be cared for if they need to quarantine or become sick? Methods such as changing leave and PTO policies, creating emergency lodging access and manager check-ins will ensure that our staff and families will be supported and cared for.

Crisis Management- “The Surge.” During the surge, it is important to make sure that communications with our clinical staff is simple and to the point. Enhancement of staff motivation can be achieved through staff appreciation and patient celebrations. Additionally, mental health resources should be promoted to leverage healthy coping skills. Non clinical staff should have consistent communications with leaders through regular manager check-ins to support work/life balance limits. Mental health should be promoted in non-clinical staff as well and virtual team activities are a great way to promote social support. During this time many staff may not be using wellness resources, but it’s important to have them in place for those who do need to access them during the crisis period, as they are typically the ones who need them the most.

Recovery- “Post Surge.” Recovery will not happen until fear and anxiety are back to baseline levels. A potential increase in mental health resource utilization may occur and should be planned for through promotion of peer support and multichannel communications. Organizations should take time to inventory their programs and make them readily accessible and available as many staff may be more likely to use wellbeing programs and services at this time.

Reintegration- “Return to the New Normal.” Prepare to implement systems to address distress, burnout and moral injury amongst staff. Training on trauma informed care for managers and labor relations staff will be very beneficial and leaders should model excellent care for the wellbeing. Lastly, organizations should establish a continuum of mental health and resilience resources for staff members to encourage seamless transitions to the “new normal.”

Additional Considerations

Future Impact. Be flexible to create and adapt to new best practices for future impacts in recovery and reintegration.