Workplace Wellness During COVID-19: As a Supervisor, What Can I Do?

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Workplace Wellness During COVID-19: What Can I Do as a Supervisor?

- Evidence-based tips
- Strategies and Resources
  - Maintaining resilience and managing stress among your team
  - Continuing to support your own wellness
Your Role in the GW Experience

- We have been fortunate at the GW Healthcare Enterprise to have an explicit mission, and clear communications at the level of organizational leadership during this time.

- However, we know one of the biggest predictors of workplace wellness for any individual is the management style of their immediate supervisor.

- We know that leadership at the GW Healthcare Enterprise is dedicated to their teams’ wellness and performance – at all levels – and are offering this resource to support your efforts, as you support GW’s.
Even under usual circumstances, those working in healthcare environments face high rates of burnout

Among our best-studied group (physicians), one third are burned out.

The lifestyle and experiences associated with our chosen professional environment can put us at risk:

- Stress & 2nd victim syndrome
- Perceived limited control
- Limited exercise
- Irregular and poor eating habits
- Sleep deprivation
- Health maintenance visits
- Work-Life balance

This will be a marathon, not a sprint.

- Disruption of our usual roles and routines
- Adjustment to new work flows and responsibilities
- Uncertainty day-to-day
- Limited understanding of the virus
- Concern for health of our families, communities, selves
What can we learn from marathoners?

- Marathon training focuses on endurance-related factors, such as lactate threshold.
- They learn to conserve energy by identifying what is necessary to them, and focusing only there.
- Their training also teaches what it feels like to run out of energy, allowing them to make adjustments if they feel it happening.
- This approach can be instructive for us – as team leaders, and for ourselves.

Self-Awareness: Important for You and Your Team

- Experiencing some stress now is normal and appropriate, and can even boost performance... to a point
- Pushing through stress that is too high can reduce performance and resilience
- Like a marathoner, being aware of signs of stress – among your team and yourself – can help with effective management
  - Take one day at a time
  - Use the tools provided (below)
  - Seek help when you need it

Workplace Wellness Predictors

- Organizational mission/purpose is explicit
- Each employee has a clear sense of their role in advancing that mission
- Transparent, two-way communication with leadership

Workplace Wellness: Predictors

- Supportive work relationships, especially with supervisors
- Leadership who role-model wellness
- Flexibility when possible
- Value and respect for the individual
- Perceived self-efficacy

There is particular clarity to our organizational purpose at this time. Depending on your area of GW, it may help to make your team’s vital role in supporting that mission explicit.

Make sure members of your team are familiar with the most current protocols and guidelines at GW. What role they are expected to take in carrying these out. Who to contact if anything does not go as planned.

Encourage questions, suggestions, and concerns. Your team members are experts in their own experience of GW, and may have noticed something that can be helpful to others.

Practical Steps: Transparent Two-Way Communication

- Reliable communication: Timely, organized, consistent
  - Daily updates may be appropriate given rapidly-shifting news and protocols.
  - Amplify relevant messages from elsewhere in the organization.
  - It is OK to share limits on current knowledge/plans. Be clear about anything currently unknown; other approaches can cause more confusion and anxiety.

- Two-way communication
  - Schedule regular team meetings – remotely if appropriate – with an agenda that explicitly includes opportunity for discussion, questions, suggestions/concerns.
  - Proactively check-in with your team – how are they doing?
  - Make it known that you are interested and available to discuss individual situations and needs.


Practical Steps: Supportive Relationships with Leaders

- Find opportunities for warm, genuine connection.
  - Make eye contact, smile (this is audible, even when not visible), enquire how they are.
  - Intentionally make time for informal debriefing.

- Encourage your team members to do the same.
  - Brief empathetic encounters in the workplace are as predictive of wellness as deeper relationships.
  - These connections support the wellness of both giver and receiver.


Opportunities for Connection

- Patient-employee interactions
- Colleague interactions
- Team meetings
- Following challenging encounters
  - “Difficult” experiences
  - Poor outcomes

Interpersonal relationships at work are important sources of support... particularly from managers/team leaders

Practical Steps:
Value and Respect for the Individual

Stress and anxiety are high, and work volume may be picking up. This is a time when the steps below are particularly important.

- Voice appreciation, and acknowledge difficulties.
- Be flexible when possible.
- Maintain boundaries:
  - Separation between professional and personal lives is key to avoid burnout at a time of high demand.
  - Avoid unscheduled intrusive (ex: phone or text) or after-hours communications if non-urgent.

Practical Steps:
Role Model Wellness, Encourage Self-Care

Like marathon runners, it is important for leaders and their team members to be attuned to when stress is too high, or energy is running low.

- Flexibility regarding schedules and roles, when possible.
- Role modeling and encouraging attention to basic needs.
  - Sleep, hydration, physical activity, healthy snacks, regular meals.
- Engaging the Relaxation Response (aka: Parasympathetic Nervous System)
  - “A state of deep rest that changes the short- and long-term physical and emotional responses to stress.”
  - Studies show benefit for emotional and physical health, cognitive performance, and productivity.
  - Evidence-based methods include meditation, mindfulness, tai chi, and yoga, but also exposure to nature (even a potted plant), physical activity, prayer, socializing, music, art, group visits, reading.

Individual members of your team will have different needs and preferences.

- Share available resources (below) and encourage them to spend at least 10 minutes daily in any practice that works for them, to support and maintain resilience.
Pacing Ourselves...

- The finish line is ahead of us, even if not as close as we would like.
- In the meantime, we will continue to receive guidance from leadership, support one another, and set small goals for our own self-care.
- Immediate supervisors are the first-line in supporting workplace wellness... and you can do so most effectively when also taking care to support yourself, and seeking assistance when needed.
- A little bit of patience and humor – for ourselves and others – always helps.

Contact me at: KBaban@mfa.gwu.edu
Resources to Share with Your Team

MORE COMING IN GW HEALTHCARE ENTERPRISE DAILY DIGEST EMAILS
In the midst of a challenging time, we have meaningful support and resources available.

- As a community, we are as prepared as possible thanks to strategic planning and clear communications from GW Healthcare Enterprise leadership.
- As individuals, effective self-care tools do not need to be time-intensive:
  - Mindful movements
  - Micro breaks
  - Brief connections
  - Hydration
  - Healthful snacks
  - High-intensity interval training (if needed)
  - Sleep (quality, quantity)
- Resources for mental health and other support for ourselves and our families are available through EAP programs and others (see below).
Resources For Our GW Community

All requests are free and confidential:

- **MFA Employee Assistance Program now includes SupportLinc**
  - Call: 888-881-5462
  - Visit: www.supportlinc.com (username: mymfa)

- **GW Hospital Employee Assistance Program**
  - Call: 800-932-0034
  - Text: 858-224-2094
  - Visit: http://uhs.acieap.com
  - Email: eapinfo@acispecialtybenefits.com

- **DC Physician Health Program**
  - Call: 256-673-2747

- **Physician Coaching through Medical Society of DC**
  - Schedule:
    https://denageorgemd.as.me/?appointmentType=13592360

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![GW School of Medicine & Health Sciences](image)

**The GWell Center for Healthcare Professionals**

[Quick Links]
Toolkit: On-the-Fly Practices

- We are not cognitively or emotionally at our best when stress is too high
  - “Microbreaks” are quick, informal, effective for short-term care
  - Shown to improve surgeon physical function and mental focus during long/difficult procedures

- Examples you can encourage – and role model – to manage stress include:
  - Focusing on a physical experience
    - If you are walking, notice: Weight shifting, or arms swinging
    - If you are sitting, notice: Feet on the floor, points of contact with the chair
    - If you are in conversation: Deep intentional breath, then re-focus on the conversation
  - Stretching – brings attention away from thoughts, releases physical tension

Brief formal practices include (resource links below):

- **Box breathing**
- **Body scan** – guided or alone
- **Brief seated or walking meditation**

Just one or two mindful deep breaths can yield short-term benefits at work in busy settings.


Toolkit: Deeper Practices

Long-term benefits of mindfulness practices – cognitively, emotionally, physically – are seen when engaged in daily for at least 10 minutes.

Many resources are now available for free.

More resources at the GWell Center for Healthcare Professionals
Quick Links > Wellness > Resources > Community-Wide > Self-Care
To the best of your ability: Eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep.

- **Activity:** Nike Training Club, J&J 7 Minute Workout, YouTube, Class Pass Go ($)
- **Sleep:** Combine an intentional wind-down period with meditation, CBTi app, reading, music...
- **Meals:** InstaCart, Meal prep kits, GrubHub... we are lucky to have &pizza, but diversity!


Toolkit: Stay Connected with Your Communities

Social Distancing ≠ Social Isolation
- Reach out to your networks!
  - Silver lining: Family and friends are very likely home without plans, too
- Find ways to stay engaged with your communities
  - Faith: Are services available online?
  - Volunteering: Other ways you can raise awareness and support the mission?

Toolkit: How to Help If You Cannot be Onsite

We all chose healthcare to help and heal others, and this is a difficult time not to be on the front lines.

Direct patient care is not the only way to make a meaningful impact (our medical students with their Clinical Public Health training particularly know this truth).

- Combat misinformation and unsafe attitudes.
- Remotely check on older neighbors, vulnerable family and friends.
- Provide social support to friends who need it.
- Find opportunities for advocacy, particularly supporting those most vulnerable.
- Amplify request donations of PPE – we are well-set at this time, but always better to be over-prepared:
  - Call 202-715-4559, or email COVIDdonations@gwu-hospital.com
- Stay tuned for structured opportunities to support our front line providers.
Toolkit: How to Combat Cabin Fever

- Explore the world virtually
  - Streaming concerts – ex. Berlin Philharmonic’s Digital Concert Hall
  - Museum tours – ex. Smithsonian Natural History, Guggenheim
  - Virtual exhibits – ex. Google Arts and Culture
  - Historical sites – ex. Stonehenge
- Keep your brain stimulated
  - Novel research or other publications
  - Puzzles, free language classes, webinars
- Catch up on sleep
  - Almost all of us are experiencing sleep debt, this can be a good time to boost immunity by catching up
- Hit your to do list
  - We all have one. And we always feel better when it’s done.
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Engaging the Relaxation Response: Good for the Individual, and the Organization

“High Reliability Organizations (HROs) must have extremely low failure rates, because the costs of failures are extremely high” – think nuclear power plants, as an example.

- Healthcare is typically not an HRO, but we strive to be.

Studies show that implementation of mindfulness techniques in healthcare “provide an effective framework to create HROs.”

**Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality** defines High Reliability as “a condition of persistent mindfulness.”

- Awareness of what is happening around and inside of us, and responding intentionally.