

39% say coronavirus stress, worry is taking mental health toll

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Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home orders in March, Americans have been reporting a decline in their mental health and well-being. Patients are worried and stressed about COVID-19, and so are physicians and other health professionals. The continuous onslaught of worry and insecurity is leading to greater mental health issues than before.

While few Americans have experienced a decline in physical health, nearly four in 10 say that worry and stress related to the threat of coronavirus has played a negative role in their mental health, according to a health tracking poll from Kaiser Family Foundation. The pandemic has had a major impact on the mental health of 12% of respondents, the poll says.

Almost half of women (46%) were found to be more likely to say the fear of COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health compared with 33% of men. On top of that, 46% of urban and 38% of suburban residents are more likely to say COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health compared to 28% of rural areas. And among adults who have experienced income or job loss due to the pandemic, 46% say this crisis has negatively impacted their mental health too.

The AMA has two free surveys to help health care organizations monitor the impact COVID-19 has on their workforce during this pandemic. The surveys can be used to track trends in stress levels, identify specific drivers of stress, and develop supportive infrastructures based on these drivers. Organizations that use the surveys will receive free-of-charge support from the AMA in launching the surveys and access to data through an easy-to-use reporting dashboard.

Additionally, the AMA offers resources to help physicians manage their own mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and provides practical strategies for health system leadership to consider in support of their physicians and care teams during COVID-19.

In an op-ed for USA Today, AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, shared seven ways to keep peace of mind amid coronavirus fears and worries

Because much of this is unscripted and uncertain, it creates a great deal of anxiety and fear for everyone. As physicians and other health professionals continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, here are some resources on improving well-being.

Listen to requests from physicians to address anxiety

With a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is common for physicians and other health professionals to experience increased levels of distress and anxiety, especially when social isolation is felt. By recognizing the sources of anxiety among physicians and other health professionals, organizations and leaders can develop targeted approaches to support their teams.

Follow mitigation tactics to reinforce well-being

Early into the evolving response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rush University Medical Center's Chief Wellness Officer Bryant Adibe, MD, commissioned a special Wellness Task Force. This task force was devoted to coordinating Rush's efforts as part of the overarching command center structure. With its collective expertise, the task force created five key mitigation tactics to reinforce well-being throughout the crisis.

Use the power of peer support

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a tremendous burden on physicians and other health professionals. It is a burden that is cognitive, physical and emotional. One way to address this ongoing burden is through a peer support program, which can positively impact and shape the culture of medicine during the pandemic and moving forward.

Keep physician well-being in focus

From basic needs like childcare and food to mental health and supportive counseling, Mount Sinai Health System in New York City maintains an up-to-date list of resources for all health professionals and employees, keeping their well-being at the center of focus.

Build resources to provide emotional support

Unprecedented challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic raises concern about well-being and stress. Physicians and other health professionals on the front lines of COVID-19 care often experience higher levels of stress, placing a heavy burden on their shoulders. With a focus on well-being, Henry Ford Health System in Detroit continues to add valuable emotional support resources to support their teams.

Implement system level changes to attack stress

The commitment to well-being at ChristianaCare in Wilmington, Delaware, began long before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, that dedication enabled the health system to build a robust well-being infrastructure that has helped to rapidly pivot and scale up available support resources to meet the needs of physicians and other health professionals during this crisis.

Stay up to speed on the AMA's COVID-19 advocacy efforts and track the fast-moving pandemic with the AMA's COVID-19 resource center, which offers a library of the most up-to-date resources from JAMA Network™, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization.