

LETTERS

Strategies to support health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic

We thank Wu and colleagues for their important commentary regarding potential psychological effects of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on health care providers.¹ Our group of multidisciplinary oncology providers was formed to support oncology health care providers, a group at high risk of burnout.² We outline additional strategies we have developed, which complement this commentary.

The wellness of health care providers is a spectrum, from engagement to burnout; we recognize that individual characteristics, experiences and organizational factors can influence one's position on this spectrum.³ Our approach follows 5 key considerations for health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic, developed by Shanafelt.⁴ At the organizational level, our group advocates to ensure that the first 3 principles (“hear me,” “protect me” and “prepare me”) are factored into decision-making and communication.

We developed resources aligned with the “support me” and “care for me” categories. First, “CREATE” (Compassion and Resilience Team-building) pairs a psychosocial services professional with clinical managers to offer support and embed low-dose interventions into clinical teams using a coaching and psychological first aid model. Second, we created a toolkit

with information on accommodation, grocery delivery, safety, coping and mental health resources. We also implemented the “Buddy Up” program to foster connectedness, by asking health care providers to form groups of twos or threes and check in daily via phone, email or text message. Other interventions include “virtual coffee mornings” to debrief, online exercise programs and virtual meditation lounges led by trained physicians. These provide tailored options for health care providers to achieve connection, mindfulness, movement and meaning.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event that has challenged health care providers' wellness and resilience; however, it provides a unique opportunity to address institutional gaps in dealing with such stressors. We hope that organizations continue “hearing, protecting, preparing, supporting and caring” for health care providers beyond this pandemic.

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