

Intensive Care Society: Wellbeing Resource Library

The Intensive Care Society is delighted to share our new wellbeing resource pack developed with Dr Julie Highfield, Clinical Psychologist. Our poster series aims to improve our understanding of psychological wellbeing at work, the impact reduced wellbeing can have and what we can do in response, and includes tips for dealing with extraordinary situations such as COVID-19 and everyday working in critical care.

It prompts the reader(s) to consider:

- Tips for approaching self-care
- How to manage personal wellbeing
- What we can do to improve our workplace
- When to ask for help

How to use these posters

Ideally the posters should not be used in isolation, but alongside other initiatives.

You could set up a staff wellbeing board, where all the posters are available together for staff to view, or you could place copies of the posters around the unit in staff areas, where staff can read them freely.

We hope you find them to be a useful resource for your multi-professional critical

care team.

To share feedback on the poster series, write to our [Communications team](#)

Resources

- Laura Vincent et al (JICS 2019) Burnout Syndrome in UK Intensive Care Unit staff: Data from all three Burnout Syndrome domains and across professional groups, genders and ages <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1751143719860391>
- Link to Second Victim <https://secondvictim.co.uk/>
- AAGBI – The Association of Anaesthetists have done lots of good work around [wellbeing support](#). This includes resources on fatigue, physical health, mental wellbeing, suicide prevention and emergency contacts.
- Civility Saves Lives – Improving workplace culture <https://www.civilitysaveslives.com/thebasics>
- Just Culture <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/just-culture-guide/>

ICS Blogs

- [Keeping your head above water, lessons from the shop floor. By Dr Julie Highfield](#)
- [No Smoke Without Fire: The Badness of Burnout](#)
- [Wellbeing in the ICU: Countering Burnout](#)

ADVICE FOR SUSTAINING STAFF WELLBEING IN CRITICAL CARE DURING AND BEYOND COVID-19

The anticipated needs of staff will vary across each of the phases, consider the following support mechanisms:

Phases	Issues and likely impact	Needs and recommended approach
Pre-phase: No cases on unit	Anticipatory anxiety about what's on its way. Inability to think clearly, feeling overwhelmed, planning. Communication errors. Tension in working relationships. "Readiness" burnout.	Increase a sense of control - the team are in a safe pair of hands. Reassurance and planning. Communication updates are key (you may be thinking ahead, they are thinking now). Escalation plan. Support to managers who are making plans and holding the stresses.
Initial phase: Case 1	Starting to get going, lots of trying out, lost time, repetition and frustration. Further anticipatory anxiety	War room - planning central to allow centralised communication. Management are visible and available. Regular communication bulletins and open forums.
Core Phase: Full scale Multiple cases	Biggest risk period. Fear infection and implications for families. Overwhelming workload. Full go mode- adrenalin and automatic pilot. Exhaustion. Moral distress as healthcare rationed. Distress linked to personal or family experience of COVID-19. Experience fear or stigma when out in public.	Have runners in PPE areas. Promote peer support. It's okay to say you are not okay - Senior staff to model this. Rotate workers from high-stress to lower-stress functions. Small pre-brief and debrief the day. Partner inexperienced workers with their more experienced colleagues. Psychological first aid - drop in sessions for staff with employee wellbeing if you have it. Ensure the basics: Breaks, Facilities (food trolley in staff room), Sleep, Days off. Manage visitors
End Phase: Immediate aftermath	Exhaustion and post trauma recovery / stress	Debriefing. Staff 11 and group sessions. Learning and preparation for the future. Organise thanks and reward. Look out for signs of PTSD in staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on edge and hyper arousal, poor sleep • flashbacks or re-experiencing • avoidance of reminders.
Long term	Some ongoing PTSD Reflection and learning	

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Most importantly this is unprecedented: It is okay to not be okay

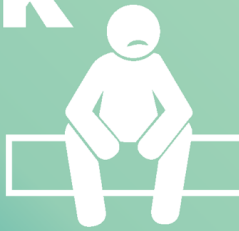
- Seek information updates at specific times during the day once or twice. The sudden and near-constant stream of news reports can cause anyone to feel worried. Get the facts. www.gov.uk
- Feeling stressed is an experience that you and many of your colleagues are likely going through. It is normal to be feeling this way in the current situation. Stress and the feelings associated with it are by no means a reflection that you cannot do your job or that you are weak.
- Managing your stress/psychosocial wellbeing during this time is as important as managing your physical health.
- Take care of your basic needs and ensure rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends.
- This is an unprecedented scenario, don't try to learn new strategies, use the ones that you have used in the past to manage times of stress.
- This is likely to be a marathon - pace yourself
- Consider your psychological energy levels - you will need to "fill up" after "emptying the tank"
- Be aware of your "bandwidth"- it might take longer to think things through and make sense of things if you are feeling overwhelmed
- Beware dramatic language that might panic your colleagues.
- Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies such as tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.
- Some workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues or team leader for social support - your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.

STOP, BREATHE, then THINK- slowing your breathing slows the stress cycle and re-engages your frontal lobes - then you can think.

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AM I OK?

1 Do you regularly feel **DISCONNECTED** from the relationship of caring for the patient, family, and colleagues?



2 Do you regularly feel **EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION** - like you have nothing left to give?

3 Do you regularly feel **A LACK OF FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT** or feeling **INEFFECTIVE** in what you do?



If you answered **YES** to all three, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work. You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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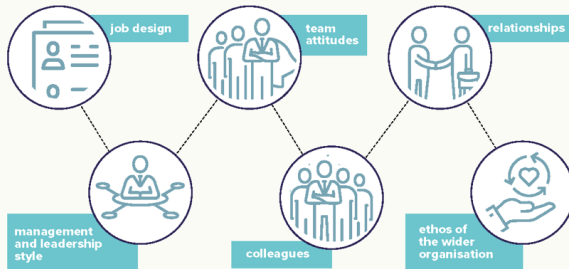
UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AT WORK



Wellbeing is the achievement of satisfaction in absence of sustained distress, with a sense of control, meaning, and purpose, and the ability to maintain good relationships.

Psychological wellbeing in the workplace is multi-faceted and influenced by individual differences (such as personality and coping style) but also work factors such as:

Work factors that can influence Psychological wellbeing



How are the above factors within your critical care unit?
Positive changes in any of the areas can result in better psychological wellbeing for all of the team.



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IMPACT OF REDUCED WELLBEING

Psychological stress is defined as demands exceeding resources. Small amounts of stress may be perceived as challenging and motivating, however sustained and excessive stress may lead to psychological distress such as feeling pressured and being overwhelmed.

Extreme stress can result in

- insomnia
- irritability
- anxiety
- burnout
- fatigue
- traumatic stress
- depression

We all have a **limited capacity** - stresses at home make it harder to manage stresses at work, and vice versa.

If you are experiencing any of the above consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work. You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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HOW TO APPROACH SELF-CARE

Your health and wellbeing matter. In the context of working in a busy critical care unit the following may be helpful.



Self-awareness is important

There will always be that one case that has a greater impact, often because there is something that you connect to. Be aware of the things that may bother you, and your own warning signs of stress.

General self-care

Take time for the things that bring you rest and joy.



Self-compassion and embrace uncertainty

Beware your own critical eye. Working in healthcare is hard and there are times when you will feel there is nothing you can do, or you cannot control the situation. Be kind to yourself and your colleagues.



There are times when our psychological wellbeing is so challenged that self-care is not enough. If you are finding things difficult, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work. You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



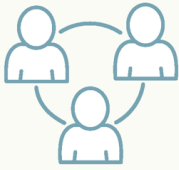
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IMPROVING OUR WORKPLACE

Critical care is a challenging environment to work in, however there are things that help reduce the emotional impact of the work. The following are ideas for your teams.



Creating space for the team to get together

Creating opportunities to discuss the impact of cases such as Reflective Rounds can help staff process the traumatic impact of the work. Safety huddles, simulation and quality and safety meetings allow a structured way of spending time together and learning more about each other. Informal spaces such as staff rooms and social events also help.

Design the working day well

The working day should be organised to balance demands but should also provide positive experiences with patients and families.



Engage staff

Create ways to engage your team, from team meetings and listening to ideas, to engaging junior staff with projects to help their sense of belonging.

**Have you noticed changes in your team?
Why not have a conversation?
Don't be afraid to ask, 'are you ok?'**



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Increase civility

We know rudeness increases clinical error. Although we can all become stressed in this environment we should beware of creating a permissive environment for rudeness to thrive. Look at the [Civility Saves Lives](#) campaign.

Learning

Encourage learning through excellence and try creating protected learning time. It's important to manage a mistake through 'what went wrong?' not 'who went wrong?' For more information: Look at the [Just Culture](#) campaign.



Developing leaders

A good leader has developed strong sense of emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Encourage new leaders to engage in leadership development to include coaching and 360° appraisals.

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MANAGING YOUR WELLBEING

Striking a balance between the positive factors and resources at work and the negative factors or demands at work isn't always easy. It is normal to have difficult days, but the following can help:

Effective "rollercoaster riding"

Some people describe working in critical care as an emotional rollercoaster, so ways to counter this are important. Remember to take your breaks. Create a few minutes to step away from the unit, take a breath and relax. Outside of work allow enough "down time" where you can switch off.



Acknowledge you are only human

The clinical work can provoke strong emotions. Sometimes when you have other issues outside work, coping with those emotions can feel even harder.

Space to reflect, share and beware using avoidant coping strategies

We see a lot in critical care, and we need space to reflect and make sense of this. Keeping very busy, avoiding discussing things, over-eating, and drinking to excess are all risk factors. Your support networks inside and outside work are good places to discuss the day.



There are times when our psychological wellbeing is so challenged that self-care is not enough. If you are finding things difficult, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work. You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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