

Stress Management for Healthcare Providers

As a healthcare provider, your physical safety and security (as well as patients) must take first priority.

The psychological challenges that you and your colleagues face after disasters are related to exposure to patients and their families who are traumatized by suffering nearly unbearable losses. These psychological challenges combine with long hours of work, decreased sleep and fatigue. Seeing the effects of disaster on others and hearing their stories contributes to your stress during a crisis. Self care, self-monitoring and peer monitoring are as important as caring for patients. The following management plan may help minimize later difficulties.

- Communicate clearly and in an optimistic manner. Identify mistakes for yourself and others and correct them. Compliments can serve as powerful motivators and stress moderators.
- Monitor yourself and your colleagues with regard to basic needs such as food, drink and sleep. Becoming biologically deprived puts you at risk and may also compromise your ability to care for patients.
- Take regular breaks from tending to patients. When on break allow yourself and encourage your colleagues to do something unrelated to the traumatic event and which you find comforting, fun or relaxing. This might be taking a walk, listening to music, reading a book or talking with a friend.
- You may feel guilt if you have fun or enjoy yourself when so many others are suffering. It is important to recognize that normal life events are an important respite from the horrors of a disaster. Help your colleagues recognize this.
- Establish a place for you and your colleagues to talk and receive support from one another. A goal of terrorist acts is to isolate people in fear and anxiety. Telling your own story and listening to other's stories can alleviate this isolation.
- Remain in contact with loved ones and participate in relaxing and enjoyable activities.
- Remember that not all people are the same. Some need to talk while others need to be alone. Recognize and respect these differences.
- Participate in department or hospital-wide meetings to keep people informed of plans and events.
- Establish support programs for your family members that provide information about your status when you are not able to return home on a regular basis. These programs should provide help and social support to your family.