

Caring for Those Who Care: Nurturing the Mental Wellbeing of Healthcare Workers

In the fast-paced world of healthcare, where each day brings new challenges and successes, it's easy to forget a vital aspect of our lives: our mental well-being. Today, what I want to talk about is something that can profoundly impact both your personal life and your work life and that's **psychological support**.

Understanding the importance of psychological support is crucial. And It's not just about feeling good- rather it's about actively taking steps to manage stress and build resilience to enhance your mental well-being now and for future challenges you may face. When you are mentally and emotionally well, it directly improves your experience and satisfaction with both your work and personal life.

But where does the real magic happen? It's when you're emotionally steady and mentally healthy that you're in the best position to support and provide outstanding patient care. Empathy, a cornerstone for healthcare organizations, comes naturally when you're not weighed down by stress or burnout. Patients benefit greatly from the compassionate care they receive, which, in turn, supports their recovery and their overall experience as a patient.

The Challenges of Healthcare

Let's be candid for a moment – the world of healthcare can be overwhelming. Shiftwork, long hours and overtime, time constraints in your workday, stressful and emotional situations associated with caring for those who are sick, exposure to human suffering, death, trauma, and unique pressures from relationships with the patients and their families, can take a real toll. However, with the right support system in place, you have a safe harbor to express your feelings, seek guidance, and find comfort to help you overcome the challenges you are facing. This support system is a crucial tool in navigating the often turbulent seas of your profession and significantly reduces the risk of burnout.

Prioritizing Mental Health

In a workplace that values psychological support, staff and management not only feel comfortable seeking help, but also recognize changes in their colleagues and reach out to check in and offer psychological support when needed. Equally important is staff perception and awareness of the organization's support. When staff believe that their organization values their contributions, is committed to safeguarding their mental well-being, and provides meaningful support when needed, it creates a psychologically supportive environment.

You can learn more about the CSA's National Standard for Psychological Health & Safety and the Psychological and Social Support factor on their YouTube video here: "[National Standard – Psychological and Social Support](#)" or you can explore the "[have THAT talk](#)" initiative by Ottawa

Public Health for further resources and guidance on taking action to reduce stigma, increase support, and encourage people to get help sooner.

Recognizing the Need for Psychological Support

Let's set the scene. It's Friday, the end of a demanding workweek. As you start your shift, you reflect that one of your colleagues has been consistently off this week. Today, she's arrived late to the staff huddle, looking distant, avoiding eye contact, and appearing preoccupied. It's clear that something is amiss. So, what should you do? Your initial thought might be to do nothing, as it's not directly your responsibility, but you're inclined to offer support. But how can you approach this delicate situation?

It all starts with a conversation.

For anyone initiating such a dialogue, it's essential to understand that the response you receive may not align with your expectations. Your offer to help might be swiftly declined or brushed aside, or even seen as offensive. But don't feel like you've failed or made a mistake; instead, allow the person some time to digest your offer. More often than not, they will come back later, willing to have that conversation.

Once the conversation begins, make sure to employ active listening techniques. This means refraining from interruptions, expressions of frustration, or giving unsolicited advice. Always remember that this discussion isn't about you; it revolves around the person sharing their story. In your role as a listener, think of yourself as a sounding board, avoiding attempts to provide therapy or advice since you may not have the necessary training.

How to initiate this conversation:

1. Start with casual conversation before assuring the person of your trustworthiness for a private discussion; make sure you choose an appropriate, neutral setting where the individual can feel comfortable and more willing to open up.
2. Mention that you've noticed a change in their behaviour and are concerned about them.
3. Encourage dialogue by asking simple, open, and non-judgmental questions.
4. Avoid making assumptions about their situation and its impact on their work.
5. Encourage them to seek advice and support, being aware of available resources for staff in need or crisis to expedite their access to support.
6. Remind them of your availability for future conversations, even after they've sought professional assistance.

Challenging the Stigma

Sometimes people don't feel they will be supported or "safe" enough to ask for psychological support. Although mental health has gained increasing attention in recent years, the stigma surrounding mental illness and addictions continues. Mental health stigma encompasses the negative stereotypes, biases, and discrimination that individuals with mental health conditions often encounter. This stigma can lead to isolation, delayed treatment, lowered self-esteem, barriers to recovery, physical health problems, and societal consequences. Breaking down this

stigma is vital for individuals as well as our workplace and society as a whole. We can challenge stigma through education, open dialogue, offering support, advocacy, and mindful language use. By fostering empathy and providing support, we can create a more compassionate and inclusive workplace.

Did you know that in 2022 KHSC launched the [Stand up to Stigma Campaign](#) spearheaded by the Mental Health and Addiction Care program. By encouraging open conversations about mental health and addiction, the aim is to normalize discussion, promote improved understanding, and combat the stigma.

Psychological Support: Resources for Staff

Despite the many resources KHSC has available to staff, and in many cases their families, feedback from staff suggests that many staff don't know about them. Check out these easily accessible resources:

- [Employee & Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#): When most people think of an EFAP they think only of counselling. While professional counseling for personal, family, and work-related concerns is a core function, KHSC's EFAP offers so much more to support staff and their families. And these services are anonymous, confidential and paid for by KHSC.
 - **Life Smart Coaching**: Get support for financial planning, grief and career counselling, legal consultation with discounted legal services (excluding real estate), child and elder care, nutritional counselling with a Dietician, addictions support and smoking cessation, and more!
 - **Online, self-directed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**: Explore "Sentio," a self-paced CBT program for managing depression and anxiety, conveniently accessible online.
 - [Homewood Pathfinder](#): Your gateway to a wide range of staff assistance and mental health services that navigates you to the right service with the ability to connect with a counsellor immediately through **MeetNow**.
 - **Trauma Care and Depression/Anxiety Care Programs** for staff requiring more intensive counselling (up to 20 hours of counselling)

You can access many of the above supports and more on the EFAP website www.Homeweb.ca. If accessing for the first time you will be required to sign up using **Customer Account Name: Kingston Health Sciences Centre** and **Invitation Code: KHS141**.

You can also call **1-800-663-1142** to schedule a counselling appointment or reach out if in crisis. Recently we've heard from some staff that they've not been happy with their EFAP experience. Please know that you can request a different counsellor if there's not a good connection with the counsellor or you can bring your concerns to KHSC's Occupational Health, Safety & Wellness Dept.

- On site [Registered Massage Therapy](#): You can now pre-book a 30-minute massage session with our therapist, Kristin Kelly, through the [KHSC Wellness website](#) or [here](#)
- [LifeSpeak](#): Access a wealth of mental health and life skills education with over 150 videos, podcasts, expert blogs, and more, available 24/7 on any device. Plus, participate in "Watch and Win" contests to stay informed and win prizes.
<https://khscprovidencecare.lifespeak.com> Access ID is: **lifespeak**

In summary, it's time we prioritize mental health and ensure that no one feels ashamed or alone on their journey towards well-being. This journey belongs to all of us, and its potential to positively influence our overall well-being is indeed remarkable. In my role as Workplace Mental Wellness Practitioner, I am here to collaborate with individuals, teams, and leaders to assess and address the challenges affecting Psychological Health & Safety. Please don't hesitate to contact me directly or utilize this confidential, anonymous platform to share your thoughts. Together, we can make a profound difference in our colleagues' lives and the quality of care we provide.

#WorldMentalHealthDay