



5 Steps to Curb COVID Fatigue Among Healthcare Heroes

Insights

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The COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight both the heroism of and challenges facing frontline healthcare workers. Like the rest of us, these heroes are still human and are no doubt experiencing fatigue. According to the American Medical Association, research studies have approximated that half of health workers have reported COVID-19 burnout. Also known as “COVID fatigue,” pandemic burnout affects everyone differently and takes many forms, including: physical fatigue, stress, anxiety, exacerbation of mental health issues, and negative mood disposition. What can your organization do to address this very real concern? This Insight dives a bit deeper into this phenomenon and provides five steps you can take.

COVID Fatigue at Healthcare Organizations is All Too Real

Though possibly more prevalent among frontline workers, healthcare organizations are feeling the crunch of this problem across-the-board. This includes workers in administrative and allied health roles, all who have experienced the feeling of burnout from countless COVID-related rules and guidance. Some are overwhelmed by seemingly ever-changing, and sometimes conflicting, workplace safety rules. Throughout the pandemic, employers have had to adapt, seeking the best ways to implement pandemic rules to protect employees and patients. On top of these challenges, a healthcare staffing crisis and overall labor shortages also threaten retention of critical workers. Under these circumstances, employers seek to collaborate with employees to relieve and mitigate COVID fatigue.

While there is no universal solution, various public health agencies, medical organizations, and research institutions have studied potential solutions to COVID fatigue. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a spectrum of practical suggestions to help employers combat COVID fatigue. One suggestion, which can be tailored to a broad range of work environments, is to institute a targeted fatigue risk management plan.

Because the pandemic has become a marathon with no definitive end in sight, employers should consider designing their own fatigue risk management plan specific to their workforce and regularly update that plan to adjust for changing circumstances. The risk mitigation plan should focus on safety among staff and patients, hopefully assisting with retention of the workforce.

5 Steps Your Organization Should Consider to Combat COVID Fatigue

Here are five practical strategies to consider when instituting a COVID fatigue risk management plan at your workplace:

1. **Identify and Assess Risk Factors:** Begin by collecting information and data to identify risks and address needs most important to your workforce. You can collect information informally by closely listening to staff concerns during meetings and around the departments. Or, you can collect information more formally by establishing regular check-ins with staff, conducting anonymous surveys, or directly posing questions related to COVID fatigue.
2. **Establish Clear Lines of Communication:** No matter how you collect information regarding the effects of COVID fatigue, clear lines of communication are critical to ensure that your information gathering will prove productive. You should therefore ensure that leaders are visible, engaged, and prepared to facilitate productive dialogue with employees regarding COVID fatigue-related concerns.
3. **Demonstrate Responsiveness to Employee Concerns:** If there is a common sentiment or complaint, you should address the major concerns and communicate what you are doing to be responsive. Even minor adjustments or responses, whether it involves scheduling, availability of supplies or creative compensation options, can be invaluable to building trust and teamwork. Showing employees that their leaders are committed to maximizing both their safety and morale can work wonders. Even small gestures of acknowledgment and appreciation can demonstrate responsiveness to employee feedback. In fact, showing appreciation, either through monetary or non-monetary awards, can help sustain and/or re-ignite motivation when COVID fatigue has set in. Even verbal acknowledgment of employees' hard work and dedication can help show employees that they are valued.
4. **Provide Appropriate Resources and Information:** While identifying challenges on employees' minds, you should also remind employees of any existing employee assistance programs (EAP) or mental health resources that may help them navigate through their COVID fatigue. In sharing resources and learning more about employees' challenges, you must remain cognizant of legal parameters and any requirements to engage in an interactive accommodation process, if applicable. Further, you must be mindful not to allow the use of EAP resources to be viewed negatively in any way. Instead, employees should feel comfortable in exploring these options. A reminder of existing EAP programs helps assure employees of your commitment to maintaining a supportive, responsive workplace.
5. **Regularly Assess Workloads:** In this era of staffing shortages, do not forget to constantly monitor and assess workloads and, once again, communicate an overall shared commitment to both patients and your staff. For off-shift workers especially, be visible and responsive. And be sure to permit adequate time between shifts to help employees get the rest they need.

In sum, healthcare employers can address COVID burnout among their employees beginning with a simple acknowledgment that you recognize its existence. A successful COVID fatigue risk management plan can help improve dialogue between employees and management to help address the concerns and worries that are most important to those on the front lines.

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Your Fisher Phillips attorneys are available for consultation and to assist in helping you design an effective COVID fatigue risk management plan tailored to your work environment. If you have questions, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the author of this Insight, or any attorney in our [Healthcare Industry Group](#). Make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight system](#) to get the most up-to-date information.

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