

Research briefing

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Organisational actions to promote the health and well-being of healthcare staff during periods of increased demand: results of a systematic review

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About the research

Looking after the health and well-being of NHS staff is particularly important during times of high pressure on services.

This is to make sure that staff are well, and also that patient care can continue to be provided.

While we know that putting help in place for individual workers (such as counselling or cognitive-behavioural therapy) can be of benefit, we know less about what organisations could do to help.

We looked for research which has already been carried out, on organisation-wide actions to help the health and well-being of staff when services are stretched.

We systematically searched in research databases for relevant studies published since 2002 from high and middle income countries.

Implications

- Our review suggests that organisation-wide strategies can have a positive effect on staff stress and burnout.
- The focus therefore should not be limited to interventions for individual staff.
- Many of the findings and author conclusions from past epidemics and pandemics are echoed in current literature relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This suggests that organisational responses to maintain the health and well-being of staff during periods of high demand continue to require attention.

Key areas for organisational action are:

- ✓ having a clear policy and strategy on staff health and well-being during times of increased demand
- ✓ having a culture and leadership which values staff well-being
- ✓ listening and acting on staff feedback
- ✓ addressing practical needs of staff
- ✓ maximising support between colleagues
- ✓ providing easy access to mental health support
- ✓ having good communication systems
- ✓ providing training in pandemic preparation.



Key findings

- We found 42 relevant research papers and categorised the actions described in the studies into nine areas (see Figure 1).
- Actions are needed to address the **practical needs** of staff including child care, adequate nutrition, resting areas, transport to work, protection of workers, and protection of workers' families.
- The **organisational culture** should support a staff well-being approach.
- There should be recognition of efforts and positive feedback, and mechanisms to ensure staff feedback is heard and acted upon.
- Leadership should inspire trust that staff well-being is a concern.
- **Communication systems** within organisations should provide clear and timely information to staff.
- Attention should be paid to developing **peer support** systems within teams.
- Some evidence suggested that optimising mutual support systems within teams could be more valuable for many staff than providing individual-targeted interventions.
- Ease of access to **mental health support** should be considered, to ensure that staff requiring this input are able, and have time to access it.

- Staff **training needs** include resilience, in-person PPE training, and preparation for pandemics.
- Monitoring and **support for staff** who are isolating or shielding is important, as they are at risk of mental health difficulties.
- There should be consideration of staff needs in pre-planning, during periods of increased demand, and also following periods of increased demand.

Gaps in knowledge

- We found little research which evaluated the effectiveness of actions taken by organisations.
- Instead, most studies described initiatives that have been tried. Some used surveys or focus groups to ask staff what they thought.
- The research all related to times of epidemic infectious disease, we did not find any studies on times of increased winter demand.
- We found little research describing how organisation-wide interventions are implemented.
- Most research had been carried out in a hospital setting.
- We found only one study which considered the working environment, and how it affects staff.

Figure 1.
Elements of
organisational
action



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