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Mental Wellness in Nursing: Developing Resiliency

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Many people look at mental wellness as the absence of mental illness. We often do not make allowances for looking at mental wellness as a continuum or reassessing how we are doing when things in our lives change.

How many times have you heard nurses become frustrated when something happens in their lives just when they felt like they were doing well? When someone is struggling to cope or even turning to negative coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, he or she may talk about a time or situation that was difficult to deal with. Often, you will hear things like “I was doing well until...” or “I did not even drink until...” It is important to look not only at how we are coping with current situations but also at how prepared we are for what may occur in the future. How mentally well we identify ourselves to be can change depending on what is happening in our lives at any given time.

Though it was certainly not a new idea, resiliency, or helping to develop a more resilient workforce, is an increasingly popular topic in healthcare post-COVID. Resiliency can be defined as the capability of a person to positively adapt to traumatic or negative experiences. What resources and coping techniques does an individual or organization must positively deal with negative situations or events?

This certainly does not mean the person will not feel stress or difficult emotions; the important thing is how the person or organization is able to recover from these difficult or traumatic situations. We may all be able to think about times in our lives when something happened that we had a difficult time managing or even whether we were going to be able to cope with what occurred. Resiliency relates to both the individual (looking at how resilient we are personally) and the organization (how resilient our workforce is). Resiliency has been studied for many years by facilities to decrease burnout rates, decrease stress, and help increase retention of the workforce.

How do we help ourselves and others become more resilient? Look at ways to debrief or use stress management techniques whenever you are able. The organization may want to look at putting in place resources or education about what can be done when staff encounter a difficult situation.

Foster an environment that is conducive to mental health and wellness in ourselves and those around us. It is important that we take steps to support ourselves and each other not only for our

own wellbeing but also to ensure that we are prepared to provide excellent and safe care to patients across Alabama every day.

Preparing A Resilient Healthcare Workforce

As nurses, we often think in terms of how a patient feels, what the patient is going through, and how we can provide better care to the patient. These are extremely important questions, but could we not ask the same things about ourselves as nurses? Throughout the healthcare sector, workers, including nurses, report increased levels of stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue. As a result, stress on an already strained healthcare community continues to increase.

As leaders in the healthcare community, we must address the needs of the workforce, including that most archetypical of healthcare workers, the nurse. These workers desperately need tools to relieve and reverse the negative effects of the pressure they are under. One important facet of this is developing resilience.

Resilience is defined as the capability to positively cope or respond to difficult or adverse experiences (Baskin & Bartlett, 2021). It is the ability to grow and flourish even through adversity or stressful situations. Resilience allows us to handle challenges effectively and efficiently, as well as to approach difficult situations in a controlled manner.

Building resilience has been found to assist healthcare workers in combatting negative outcomes, including burnout, compassion fatigue, and anxiety. It is also found to be an indicator of how successfully a person may react to a stressful situation. As a healthcare worker's building stress exceeds the level of the individual's resilience, job performance can be negatively impacted (Baskin & Bartlett, 2021). It is important to look at the health, wellbeing, and resilience of the healthcare community, not only for themselves, but also for the safety and protection of patients.

Resilience can be assessed personally, to determine steps we can take to promote our own wellbeing through techniques to de-stress, take care of ourselves, build positive relationships with others, and seek help when needed.

Still, we also must look beyond the individual when considering resilience in the context of a team or the workforce. According to Igoe (2020), building a resilient team requires hard work, including abandoning the belief that resilience can only be achieved as an individual.

Organizations and leaders can look at ways to build, promote, and sustain a resilient workforce. A resilient team should start with honest communication, assessing the levels of stress, making conscious plans for how to support the workforce, understanding and encouraging team members to ask for help, and even promoting self-care. It is important to foster positive communication styles, learn to give encouragement, show support, and open the dialogue for constructive feedback. As we take active steps in the attempt to make a positive impact, we may see improvement not only in the team's resiliency, but also in fostering safe and effective patient care.

Resources:

Baskin, R. G., & Bartlett, R. (2021, November). Healthcare worker resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic: An integrative review. *Journal of nursing management*. Retrieved

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Igoe, K. J. (2020, September 21). How to build-and lead-resilient health care teams during COVID-19. Executive and Continuing Professional Education. Retrieved January 18, 2023, from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/how-to-build-lead-resilient-health-care-teams-covid-19/>
World Health Organization. (2019, May 28).

Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”: International classification of diseases.
<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>