

Mental Health (vs Mental Illness) in Challenging Times

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Covid-19



About a Nurse



“I know it’s been a rough shift,
but look at the bright side...
only 7 hours to go.”

AT WORK LIKE



I CAN'T!

Overview

- What is Mental Illness and how does it differ from Mental Health?
- What are the key components of Mental Health?
- How can we influence our own level of Mental Health?
- Discussion questions in small groups – opportunity to reflect with those who 'get it'.

What happened & Where am I going from here?

The Situation

- Covid
 - 11-12% increase in prevalence of depression and anxiety in Australia in 2020 (25% increase globally) ¹
 - Worse mental health for PwMS during covid²
- Cabarkapa, S et al,.(2020) The psychiatric impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers. Australian Journal of General Practice, 49(12).
 - The risk to mental wellbeing of HCW during a pandemic is multifaceted, due to high risk of infection, stress of infecting family members and higher levels of workplace stress.
 - Greater risk of suicide, suicidal ideation and self harm
 - High pressure work environments increase chance of burnout
- Funding for more frontline services – treatment is critical re Mental Illness
- Prevention is ignored
- Can't prevent all Mental Illness, but can focus on those with high risk factors (like Nurses) and look at balancing protective factors³

¹ COVID-19 Mental Disorders Collaborators. (2021). Global prevalence and burden of depressive and anxiety disorders in 204 countries and territories in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet*, 398, 1700-1712. ² Uhr et al. (2021) Sociodemographic and clinical factors associated with depression, anxiety, and general mental health in people with multiple sclerosis during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Mult Scler Relat Disord* Nov; 56 ³Carbone, S. (2020) *Evidence review: The primary prevention of mental health conditions*. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

What is Mental Illness?

- A diagnosable condition that affects thinking, feeling, mood or behaviour, or a combination.
- Complex mental health challenges over a sustained period of time
- Sustained and clinical levels of distress
 - Major Depressive Disorder
 - Generalised Anxiety Disorder
 - Panic, Social Anxiety, Phobia-related Disorders
- A bad day with symptoms of depression or high levels of worry is not the same as having a Mental Illness

What is Mental Health?

- Mental Health is not just an absence of Mental Illness
- We all have a level of Mental Health
- Mix of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing (*and* physical wellbeing)
- Key to positive relationships and high-level functioning

“...a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 03 June 2022)

World Health Organization. 03 June 2022. Why Mental Health is a Priority for Action on Climate Change.

Is your Mental Health stable?

- No. Many variables contribute and can change over time
 - External – situational/systemic
 - Internal - choices/behaviours/thinking
- A continuum – huge impact on functioning
- Avoiding burnout
 - Multilayered approach acknowledging systemic failings and improvements needed at every level

When the boss asks why you're here late again



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- A continuum – huge impact on functioning
- Avoiding burnout
 - Multilayered approach acknowledging systemic failings and improvements needed at every level
 - Individual accountability and influence
- What are the 'symptoms' of poor mental health?



'The Mental Health Continuum is a Better Model for Mental Health'. June 2020. www.delphis.org.uk

Key components of Mental Health

- Multifactorial and individual
- Emotional Wellbeing
 - Happiness levels and interest
 - Recognising, expressing and modulating emotions
- Psychological Wellbeing
 - Functioning effectively, stress management
 - Purpose, meaning, autonomy and self acceptance
 - Being able to adapt to change
- Social Wellbeing
 - Healthy, supportive, nurturing relationships
 - Sense of belonging, involvement in community, adding value
- Physical Wellbeing
 - Mental and physical fitness and health are intertwined. Both are impacted by sleep, diet and exercise

Strategies to Increase Emotional Wellbeing

- Emotional Wellbeing
 - Happiness levels and interest
 - Recognising, expressing and modulating emotions
- Practice Emotional Wellbeing strategies by:
 - Reducing judgement on self and others. Instead, be a curious observer.
 - Ask for help when needed.
 - Practicing Mindfulness and being present in each moment.
 - Paying attention to feelings, emotions and thoughts. Learn to sit with and name them, rather than resisting uncomfortable emotions.
 - Learning techniques to increase levels of self compassion.

Strategies to Increase Psychological Wellbeing

- Psychological Wellbeing
 - Functioning effectively, stress management
 - Purpose, meaning, autonomy and self acceptance
 - Being able to adapt to change
- Practice Psychological Wellbeing strategies by:
 - Setting realistic (and meaningful) goals (and ticking them off)
 - Managing stress proactively and with intent (speak to manager/set boundaries/say no/assertiveness training/examine and challenge self talk)
 - Knowing your coping strategies (& avoiding maladaptive ones i.e alcohol, excessive escapism)
 - Practicing Gratitude daily
 - Finding out what brings you meaning and plan to engage in it often. Prioritise it.
 - Being able to name your purpose.

Strategies to Increase Social Wellbeing

- Social Wellbeing
 - Healthy, supportive, nurturing relationships
 - Sense of belonging, involvement in community, adding value
- Practice Social Wellbeing Strategies by:
 - Attending to communication skills with people you love
 - Nurturing your (healthy) relationships
 - Connecting with community – knowing you have something of value to offer and making a contribution by being active and involved

Strategies to Increase Physical Wellbeing

- Physical Wellbeing
 - Mental and physical fitness and health are intertwined.
Both are impacted by sleep, diet and exercise
- Practice Physical Wellbeing Strategies by:
 - Attending to sleep, diet and exercise!
 - Set good habits and make these things routine (so you don't have to exercise willpower!)

Discussion Questions for groups of 3-4

What happened?
&
Where am I
going from here?

1. Where is the point of greatest satisfaction in your work with PwMS?
2. Has the covid experience threatened/taken away/changed the source of that satisfaction? In what way? What have you found the hardest?
3. Looking at your workplace, what could be done to decrease the chance of burnout for you and your colleagues? Is there a way to advocate for one of those changes when you return from this conference?
4. Maintaining and building Mental Health to avoid burnout.

Examining the 4 components of Mental Health (Physical, Emotional, Social, Psychological) are there considerations you could take on board to protect and preserve, or build, your Mental Health? Is there a self-care strategy you currently use that you could share with your group?