

ADDRESSING THE STRESS OF WORKING IN A CARE HOME SETTING

We have lost so much in the last few weeks;

- Social connection – social distancing and isolating from others at home and in work has meant a loss of colleague and family contact and support as we knew it
- Safe environments – home and work life may no longer feel safe as we try to protect ourselves, our families and the residents from an unseen virus
- Routine – we cannot work in the way we used to and the new routines are unfamiliar, some are uncomfortable and they keep changing
- Security/assumptions – the assumption that we will wake in the morning and be healthy is in doubt and we don't know where the virus will strike and whether we and those around us will be okay,
- And then we may lose some of the residents due to this disease

So how might staff be feeling?

There will be a wide range of feelings that staff may experience;

- Anger about what is happening to them and those close to them
- Sadness for what they and others have lost or may lose
- Fear of becoming unwell or of the future
- Guilt that they are at work and what that means for their family, that they can't do more for their residents, that they have to stop people visiting
- Anxiety around what is happening now and might happen in the future

And how might residents be feeling?

- A loss of social connection
- They may no longer feel safe where they are
- Their routines have changed
- They may feel frustrated that they can't leave their rooms
- Sadness that they cannot have visitors
- Distressed and anxious

How can you help yourself?

It is important to look after yourself whether at work or at home so that you can continue to support those around you. Ways of doing this might be: -

- Remember that how you are feeling is not unique to you
- Focus on the things that you can do and not the things you can't
- Have the contact number of someone you can speak with who will support your mental well-being. This might be a family member, a friend, a manager or a colleague, but choose someone who can support you rather than someone who needs your support

- If you work in a team, consider how you might have staff debriefs at the beginning and/or end of a shift to give time to explore how people are feeling and for the team to be kept informed
- Look out for each other and take regular breaks
- Access any employee support schemes that are available especially where they provide counselling or emotional support
- Access links to websites or organisations that support mental health and well-being
- Try and create new ways to de-stress now that our tried and tested techniques like the gym and socialising are no longer available. Consider expressing your feelings through writing or other creative ideas, meditate, use mindfulness, write gratitude diaries, try journaling and talking to friends and family
- Be aware that emotional distress is also physically tiring so don't be surprised at being more tired than usual or lacking in energy

How can you support residents?

- You cannot change the situation for the residents but listening to their anxieties and being empathic will make a big difference to them
- Ensure that residents have access to tools such as skype, whatsapp and zoom as a way of supporting them to stay connected with their family and friends
- Don't be afraid to talk about what they are worried about and what is difficult. This might include discussions around advance care planning

Additional resources

- Managers might consider how to build resilience for staff by accessing resources through Skills for Care (e.g. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Leadership-management/managing-people/resilience/Building-resilience.aspx>)
- <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou> helps you look at how you can make small practical changes that fit in with your life with free tips, tools and support
- If you have to stay at home for a period of time, this website gives you helpful advice as to how best to cope with it <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/>)
- This website considers different ways of looking after your mental health <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/looking-after-your-mental-health>)