Support of NHS staff during the COVID-19 pandemic – guidelines for evaluation

National COVID-19 Staff Support Evaluation Group

The National COVID-19 Staff Support Evaluation Group evolved from the Major Trauma Psychology Network email distribution list - a national group of psychologists who work in Major Trauma Centres across the UK. It is a separate standalone group, of over 50 psychologists and other mental health practitioners working within physical and mental health settings. The focus of the group is to promote evaluation of staff support initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

The psychological wellbeing of healthcare staff is a key consideration during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wallbank, 2020). There is a recognition that support might take place within organisations (British Psychological Society, 2020; Greenberg, Docherty, Gnanapragasam, & Wessely, 2020), as well as external to organisations (e.g. Health for Health Professionals Wales, National Wellbeing Hub for Scotland, NHS England Support Line).

NHS England and NHS Improvement have identified that any support provided must be "responsive to testing and evaluating" (Wallbank, 2020, para. 1). However, to date no specific guidance for testing and evaluating has been made available.

The importance of evaluation

The evaluation of staff support initiatives is important for several reasons:

    1) It can help provide up-to-date information about the effectiveness and acceptability of staff support initiatives, which in turn can lead to important adaptations to the initiatives.

    2) It can provide helpful learning with regards to which staff support initiatives are most effective for improving staff wellbeing and most acceptable to members of staff, which has the potential to help the NHS to be best prepared ahead of any future major incidents affecting the wellbeing of NHS staff.

    3) It can highlight the potential benefits and challenges of providing support for staff, both within and external to NHS trusts.

    4) It can help indicate whether greater ongoing staff support within the NHS would be beneficial into and beyond the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5) It can highlight the important role that psychologists and other mental health professionals can play in supporting staff within their organisations.

Furthermore, the National COVID-19 Staff Support Evaluation Group supports collaboration between different NHS trusts, in order to promote:

1) Sharing of best practice

2) Collation of evaluation data, in order to produce larger, more robust datasets

Recommendations for evaluation

1. **Recording all staff support activity.** All staff support activity should be accurately recorded. This is to ensure an accurate record of any contact with staff members, including issues pertaining to risk. Further, activity data can be used to better understand which staff groups are accessing support, and which ones are not, as well as to help indicate the forms of support receiving the greatest uptake. Any activity data should be recorded in a secure database, in line with local trust governance guidance.

2. **Collecting feedback.** Individuals and organisations providing support for staff should be encouraged to collect feedback from the staff that they are supporting. Feedback should be collected for any one-to-one work, as well as for support provided in the format of teaching, training or groups. It is advisable that feedback forms are brief, so as not to place additional burden on staff, and allow for a combination of quantitative and qualitative responses. Administering electronic feedback forms can help reduce risk of infection. We recommend ensuring that the Trust's Information Governance team are consulted during this process to identify which survey software has been approved for use in your Trust.

3. **Staff Reported Outcomes.** We recommend the use of outcome measures pre and post any ongoing individual or group psychological interventions, when possible and if clinically appropriate. Outcome measures should be reliable and valid, as well as relevant to the presenting concerns. We encourage the use of clinical judgement with regards to identifying the most appropriate measures to use. We recommend ensuring the appropriate licences have been obtained prior to using measures which may require this.

4. **Feedback from those providing support.** It is important to also collect feedback from those members of staff who are providing wellbeing support. These individuals are well placed to provide helpful information with regards to the effectiveness of any staff support initiatives. Feedback can also help ensure adequate levels of supervision are in place for those providing support, as well as to identify any additional wellbeing or training needs for those individuals.

5. It is important that any plans for evaluation are discussed with the local Trust's Research and Development and Information Governance teams. They can provide advice regarding local policy, particularly with regards to factors such as recording identifiable information and how best to store data securely.

References

British Psychological Society. (2020). *Guidance for psychological professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic.* https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/News/News%20-%20Files/Guidance%20for%20Psychological%20Professionals%20during%20Covid-19.pdf

Greenberg, N., Docherty, M., Gnanapragasam, S., & Wessely, S. (2020). Managing mental health challenges faced by healthcare workers during covid-19 pandemic. *BMJ, 368*, 1-4. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1211

Wallbank, S. (2020). *NHS Briefing paper for NHSEI and NHS staff wellbeing offer during COVID19 response.* http://horizonsnhs.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Briefing-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-NHS-Staff-during-COVID19.pdf

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