

- Identify a trusted colleague who can be someone to support you in listening, reflecting on the issues being faced. This person should not be going through the same experience and should have no connection to the issue under scrutiny. They are for your own support alone – although they may be able to provide that to a number of people in the team.
- Be careful of prolonged imbalance in work-life - additional hours can help reduce stress in the short term but may not be helpful to wellbeing in longer term.
- Take time off – make sure you are taking your holiday entitlements – and that you are properly taking the time – you should not be checking emails or taking work calls.
- Know what additional supports are available and use them – they are there to support your wellbeing.

As a team

- Have clear communication plans and make sure you hold meetings even if the only report is “nothing to report”. This will help reduce anxiety, keep the team connected, and stop rumours and myths from spreading.
- Provide opportunities for team reflection and honest acknowledgement of people’s emotions. Consider taking advantage of available team supports in the trust such as TEAM TIME and Spaces for Listening.
- Have clear information regarding Trust Psychological Supports
- Remember to support and look after each other. Peer support is crucial in these situations.

3. Manage your exposure to the news and social media

Whilst it can be helpful to keep informed, try to find balance. Don’t avoid the news altogether but if you find that it is causing you distress, then put a limit on your news intake. Use reliable sources to inform yourself rather than speculation. General media reports may not have all the information and watching these may trigger feelings of frustration and anger that are unhelpful in that you cannot influence this area.

4. Available Supports

- Psychological Services Support Phonenumber:02896151888
- Psychological Services Support email address:
psychologicalsupport@belfasttrust.hscni.net
- BWell Website & App
- Staff Care Counselling Support Tel: 08007313674
- Occupational Health via Management referral

Maintaining Psychological Wellbeing during times of challenge



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Working in health and social care means having to deal with difficult situations every day. These include making difficult clinical decisions, working with others who can cause us stress, and managing our own personal life stresses. There are also times when our organisations, services and work comes under additional questions from external review and this will place additional pressures on each of us as individuals and teams. These may include Independent reviews/ public enquiries/ media reporting etc... In these times it is important to pay some additional attention to individual and team wellbeing and there are some tips that will help remind us of ways to look after ourselves and each other. The BHSCT BWell website and App also offer a number of supports and advice around self-care, both physically and psychologically. These can be accessed by anyone just type BWell: Staff Health & Wellbeing into any search or download the app.

STOP, BREATHE, then THINK – slowing our breathing slows the stress cycle and re-engage our frontal lobes – then we can think.

What can we do to look after ourselves and each other?

1. Acknowledge stress

It is normal to feel more vulnerable when we feel “under the microscope”. We are all used to trying to make sure that our services are providing the best possible care to patients and families. However we also need to be honest in acknowledging that as humans, when others question what we do, we will experience a range of emotions:



These emotional reactions happen as we experience feelings of threat. We may feel them on behalf of colleagues, the Trust and ourselves. Also as these events are usually media focused they also can carry into our home lives and home time and we may not be able to explain/ talk to our families about what is going on.

It can be especially hard if we aren't sure how long the external checks/ questions/media attention will last, or if it is something that may come back into the press every now and then, maybe due to new information, police reporting or new media interest.

Anxiety, distress and worry are likely to be one of the biggest challenges. This can lead to:

- Increased physical stress symptoms –eg headaches / stomach complaints/tiredness
- Behavioural symptoms – changes in eating patterns (more/ less eating); increased use of alcohol; not wanting to meet people which may be due to not wanting to be in situations where event is discussed or generally feeling more tired and less interested in socialising.
- Increase in checking behaviours / working longer hours to feel assured of own work practice – this can however lead to less balance / increased stress and tiredness
- Difficulties sleeping – which can impact on mood and problem solving.



Frustration and anger can also be common feelings. This may just be a sign of our stress or it may be because we feel there is wrong information in the press or in the community and we may be unable to correct this. We may be worried about our **colleagues**, we may feel that there is too much pressure on our teams or ourselves to make things ‘right’ and that may feel like too big an expectation. We may also be angry because our own work is being questioned or judged and we may feel this is unfair.

Even when we are happy about our own **practice** we can still feel shame because we are connected with a service under scrutiny or where harm has potentially been done and that can reduce our enjoyment of our job and make us worry about our ability to do our job well.



2. Make time to reduce stress

Personally:

- Pay attention to your physical and emotional wellbeing – REHYDRATE / REFUEL & REST remain important messages for wellbeing.
- Look out for signs like those mentioned above that might suggest you need to pay more attention to these areas.
- Make sure time is protected for your normal activities that help you cope with stress.
- Remind yourself of the exceptional work that you do and the skills and knowledge you bring into work every day.