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Energy magazine

May/June 2022 Issue

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Transforming Sick Care into Genuine *Health* Care

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Who provides care for the provider?*

Debra Reis

We are in a healthcare crisis created by many stress factors - Covid, mental health concerns, increased drug overdoses, and more. Combine these factors with short staffing, low resources, and inadequate supplies to care for others, and you get healthcare workers who are frustrated, anxious, and burned out. We don't have healthcare; we work in "sick care." Over 70% of healthcare workers report daily anxiety, depression, and frustration.¹ Organizations with stressed-out workers taking care of ill patients is not a good combination. Transformation of sick care to healthcare is necessary now!

We will all need healthcare at some time, and quality care may not be available. We need to shift the tide from sick care to healthcare. One solution is to embrace the benefits of holistic therapies. There is a great deal of evidence for holistic modalities for patients in clinical settings. Let's consider expanding this movement for supportive therapies as part of the renewal efforts for our healthcare organizations and those who provide care.

CARING SHOULD BE THE HEART OF HEALTHCARE

Caring should be an expectation in our healthcare organizations. In reality, we have sick providers caring for others in a sick system. Who provides care for the provider? Time and resources are precious. Managers get caught up in filling staffing "holes" and putting out the "fires," which take priority over providing care for the nurses and other workers. It's hard to catch your breath when dealing with the chaos all around. However, if healthcare workers don't receive renewal and caring efforts, burnout and turnover happen rampantly across the country. Replacement of healthcare workers is more expensive as nurse recruiting and orientation are costly measures. It only makes sense to invest in our current staff to reduce their stress and bring renewal resources that they can utilize quickly.



CURRENT SOLUTIONS ARE NOT WORKING

The usual approach to help retain nurses and other healthcare workers is to offer monetary incentives, Covid relief bonuses, and sign-on packages - which are not working anymore. There is greater resentment and frustration with those workers who have remained with the organization. We even have the National Guard and travel nurses filling open positions. These temporary fixes do not address the root of the problem.

Many organizations have Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), which offer excellent services to help counsel and support staff. However, recent surveys report that over 50% of nurses don't feel they have any emotional support or resources from their organizations.¹ Others say that they don't have time, cannot adjust their schedule, or EAP does not resonate with them.

Other strategies offered to workers include relaxation apps or teaching handouts. Who has time to pull up an app or find a flier when you are in crisis? Some places do have programs to help staff cope with traumatic events. These can be an excellent service to healthcare staff - but usually occur *after* the event and are not something people can use *during* the crisis.

PARADIGM SHIFT - MIND/BODY/SPIRIT BALANCE

It's time for new ideas to help restore and renew staff. The time is now to move into a "healthy" care system. Instead of reverting to old retention or recruiting methods, why not provide innovative strategies to bring coping and renewal, such as supportive therapies? Therapies can be utilized in less than 5 minutes to bring balance and peace to the individual under stress.

You may not be able to change the chaos you are dealing with in your setting, but you can change how you manage the situation.

SUPPORTIVE THERAPIES DEFINED

Supportive therapies are also known as holistic, complementary, or alternative therapies. These therapies are not typically taught in nursing or medical schools nor integrated with healthcare organizations. However, these modalities are recognized by the National Institute of Health, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, which provides significant funding for research in holistic therapies. There are a variety of categories in the National Center, and the Mind/Body category is where many therapies fall that we used in the clinical setting. However, there is little to no research or evidence on integrating supportive therapies and their benefits for health providers in the clinical arena.

THREE PILLARS FOR SUPPORTIVE THERAPIES

The Supportive Therapy Engagement Program (S.T.E.P.) provides strategies in three categories for healthcare providers to select and use for themselves or others within the clinical setting.

- 1. Relaxation Therapies:** include breathwork, visualization, and energy therapy. Use these therapies alone or in combination with other treatments to bring in a sense of peace during stressful times.
- 2. Clinical Aromatherapy** - essential oils are being used more often in clinical settings, primarily with inhalation and diffusion. Consideration must be given to safety and use in practice. The use of aromatherapy can be quick to calm and renew a sense of well-being.
- 3. Gentle Movement** - these therapies such as yoga, Nia, Ageless Grace, and even walking are gaining more importance in plans for patients. Still, they are equally crucial for healthcare providers to integrate energy renewal and stress reduction into their day.



WAYS YOU CAN UTILIZE HOLISTIC THERAPIES TO CALM THE CHAOS FAST:

- Consider specific breathwork to soothe yourself under stress.
- Use a portable aromatherapy inhaler with Rosemary or Peppermint essential oil to aid mental clarity.
- Stretch to have your arms over your head - which releases tension in your neck and shoulders and takes less than 30 seconds!

Once you have these supportive therapies, you can bring in one or more to guide you and those you serve, to gain peace and balance both quickly and effectively. You may be in a stress-filled environment,

but you don't have to let that stress bring you physical and emotional health concerns. Consider holistic therapies that can be used in 5 minutes or less to relieve stress and cultivate peace with balance. Supportive therapies can be used successfully by busy healthcare workers in clinical settings for their well-being. This action is one step to truly transform our current sick care system into healthcare. €

References:

1. Kirzinger A., Kearney A., Hamel L., Brodie M. (2021). The toll of the coronavirus pandemic on health care workers. The Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey.



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