

Editorial

Mental Health of Healthcare Professionals

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The World Health Organization defined mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables individuals to cope with stresses, realize their abilities, learn well and work well and contribute to society.”¹ Healthcare professionals are susceptible to mental health issues such as depression, prescription drug usage, and emotional tiredness (‘burnout’).² In addition to this, suicide rates are very high among doctors, especially female doctors. These symptoms frequently have a detrimental effect on productivity and healthcare efficiency in addition to the well-being of individuals who are being affected.³

A major report on health and work in the National Health Services (NHS) by the Royal College of Physicians in 2013 addressed the substantial job-related mental health problems experienced by NHS employees.⁴ High levels of bullying, dissatisfaction, absences due to illness, emotional exhaustion, and premature resignation are all manifestations of this. The causes of discomfort are multifaceted and might be attributed to the doctors’ limitations.⁵

Recent research suggested that in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall mental health condition of healthcare professionals has worsened due to numerous variables, including higher workload, fear of COVID-19, psychological distress, and other environmental factors.⁶ To highlight the roles of social support (resources) and individual coping skills (resilience) as potential therapeutic targets, researchers showed that social support and resilience significantly influence the link between work stress and anxiety/depression.⁷

Working long shifts and irregular hours, as well as sleep loss, can lead to psychological distress for healthcare personnel. The psychosocial work environment may also be a risk factor.⁸ Research found that health professionals frequently experience problematic relationships and conflicts with colleagues, hostile work environments, and a lack of

professional assistance. However, working in a team has been linked to improved stress management.⁹

Perfectionism is a common personality trait among medical practitioners, which can lead to increased self-criticism, stress, and depression.¹⁰ Again, medical professionals may experience psychological vulnerabilities such as a strong sense of commitment, an instinct to please other people, remorse for situations beyond their control, inadequacy, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors.¹¹

Doctors may be hesitant to seek help for mental health issues for various reasons, including a lack of information about available resources and concerns regarding their career prospects.¹² Efficient evaluation and therapy benefit both doctors and those they serve. Neglected mental health issues in professionals can lead to diminished performance, unethical misbehavior, and inadequate delivery of care.¹³

Awareness of mental health issues among healthcare providers should be increased. Governments, healthcare systems, and healthcare organizations must develop and maintain infrastructure and resources to assist healthcare workers. Specific measures may differ, but typical approaches involve conducting periodic surveys and evaluations of stress and mental health symptoms, modifying their workload, and assuring time for them to return to normal.

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