

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Emergency Department Staff

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Abstract

Objective: Assess the psychological impact of working in emergency department during the pandemic and to assess the level of support to the staff.

Method: A survey consisting of ten questions was sent to ED staff to complete through Survey Monkey website.

Results: The responses to the survey showed that most of the ED staff felt that they were psychologically affected during working in ED in the pandemic. Nevertheless, only a minority of the staff sought help from mental health team. The staff felt very well supported and scored the teamwork level as excellent. Just less than half of the staff thought about changing their career due to the stress level in ED.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic; Emergency Department Staff; Psychological and Mental Health Problems

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all the people in the community and especially the healthcare staff. One of the most affected groups of the healthcare system were the staff working in ED. They have been the first point of contact with almost all COVID-19 patient presenting to the healthcare system. The increased workload and the nature of the medical cases seen during the pandemic had has a great psychological impact on the staff. Most of the staff reported some sort of mood changes on top of the physical burn out. Nevertheless, not all staff asked for help regarding their psychological and mental health problems. Nearly one quarter only sought help while the rest overlooked the problem. The majority of the staff also thought that the nature of their work represents a risk to their household and relatives. It is clear that the staff has been physically and psychologically affected by working in the emergency department during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

A survey consisting of ten questions to assess whether the staff felt psychologically affected, during working in ED through the COVID-19 pandemic, and also assess how well they felt supported in the department and if they have ever asked for help during the pandemic. The survey was sent to ED staff including nurses, HCA, doctors and even admin staff.

40 responses were received and analysed through survey monkey website.

Questionnaire

The ten questions were carefully chosen and efforts were made to make them simple, easy to answer and does not take a long time to be completed. It contained yes/no questions and 2 scoring questions on a scale of 1 to 5.

Yes/no questions

Question	Yes	Percentage%	No	Percentage %
Has the COVID-19 affected you psychologically	32	80%	8	20%
Have you noticed any mood changes during working in the ED during the Pandemic	34	85%	6	15%
Have you asked for any sort of psychological support during the pandemic	10	25%	30	75%
Have you felt well-supported by the department	31	79.49%	8	20.51%
Have you tested positive during the pandemic	17	42.5%	23	57.5%
Have you been on sick leave for symptoms suspicious of COVID infection	18	45%	22	55%
Do you think your work in ED was a risk for your households	32	80%	8	20%
Have you thought about changing your work/career while working in ED during the pandemic	16	41.03%	23	58.97%

Question	Weighted average	1	2	3	4	5
Level of support	3.44	2 (5.13%)	4 (10.26%)	14 (35.9%)	13 (33.33%)	6 (15.38%)
Teamwork	4.21	0 (0%)	2 (5.13%)	6 (15.38%)	13 (33.33%)	18 (46.15%)

Results

Analysis of the responses from the survey shows clearly that healthcare staff working in the emergency department has been affected in different ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. 80% Of staff felt psychologically affected and 85% reported mood changes while working during the pandemic. Only one-third of those affected sought psychological or mental health help. Less than half of the staff caught the infection and the majority of them felt that the nature of their work represented a risk for their households. More than one third thought about changing their career, while working during the pandemic.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and still represent a huge challenge not only for the people in the community who has suffered financially and psychologically from losing loved ones for the deadly virus, and from the impact of lockdowns, but also for the Healthcare staff who has suffered from the aforementioned aspects plus the increased workload and stress while working in emergency departments throughout the whole country. From the survey responses and analysis, it is clear that the staff has been psychologically and mentally affected. Nevertheless, only one-third of those affected sought psychological or mental health support. This means that the majority continued to work without seeking any support. Given the physical and mental burden the staff experienced nearly 41% thought, at some point, about changing their career to work in a different environment, given the high level of stress and workload in the emergency department. The positive finding from staff responses is that most of them felt well supported from the department and reported that teamwork within the department was excellent. That may explain how they may have carried on doing their precious and valuable work during the Pandemic, despite the high level of stress and workload. It could also explain why most of them did not seek further support

for their problems. Research that looks at how the staff feels during work, reports that feeling well supported and working in teams has a positive impact of their performance and so on patient care.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenge for the emergency medicine staff and had affected them both physically and psychologically. Good support from the department and working in an effective team helped the staff overcome the huge burden experienced during the pandemic. However, emergency departments should make sure to assess the psychological impact on staff on regular basis and offer staff the support they need.

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