

Moral Distress and Moral Injury in COVID-19

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Agenda



- Moral Distress and Moral Injury in COVID-19 – A Case Study
 - Dr. W. Liang, Monica Staley-Liang
- Dr. Josee Jarry, University of Windsor
- Supporting Health Care Professionals During the Pandemic
 - Angela D'Alessandro, Bradie Cox
- Q & A

Case Study



FS, 60M, admitted for COVID like symptoms. He declined rapidly, requiring intubation and mechanical ventilation. His spouse was not allowed to visit because of the NO VISITOR policy. ICU physician told the wife there was a shortage of ventilators and the triage team has made a no escalation decision regarding her husband's treatment. She began begging to see her husband. She began wailing from the first time you saw her, which is agonizing to hear. You provided empathic listening as you grapple with the realities of the couples' separation during his final hours. Despite her incessant pleading, it is critical that you abide by the visitation policy of the hospital. You have been forced to hold the line of the no contact policy. She is your third encounter today.

Moral Distress



- Being forced to make clinical decisions, based on resource scarcity, that are inconsistent with therapeutic values is painful and distressing.
- Being constrained by circumstances and system-based protocols can cause an assault to the HCP moral codes and foundational values(Jameton).
- Feeling of exhaustion, helplessness, frustration, guilt, shame and worry are experienced by a lot of HCPs.

Moral Injury



- Sustained distress can evolve into moral injury
- It occurs when we perpetuate, bear witness to, or fail to prevent an act that transgresses our deeply held moral codes
- Given the gravity, complexity, frequency of ethical, moral challenges and moral dilemmas being presented
- Critical life and death decisions such as triage, rationing of care and no contact rules
- Moral injury is erosion in trust in self, leadership and system as a whole
- Perceived loss of ethical integrity can diminish one's personal and professional identity. Therapeutic effectiveness can become compromised

Supporting Health Care Professionals During a Pandemic



What can we expect health care professionals to experience during a crisis?

- COVID-19 is putting tremendous responsibility onto health care professionals
- Those working in an emerging/prolonged crisis will likely experience their own stress response as a result of needing to adapt to changes and disruption to usual routines
- Stress responses can become heightened when HCP witness the needs of others who are experiencing a traumatic circumstance
- Increased stress from family members seeking information and reassurance
- May be caring for more dying patients than usual, with a more rapid trajectory of physical decline
- Professional grief is a normal response, but may go unrecognized
- Usual ways of coping with loss (self-care routines such as exercising, spending time with family and friends) may be challenged

Risks of Moral Distress



- The concept of moral distress can be present when a HCP knows the right thing to do, but situational or other constraints make it nearly impossible to follow the right course of action.
- Care providers may be experiencing moral distress related to:
 - Having to enforce strict visitor restrictions
 - Wishing one could do more for a patient or family
 - Working in resource constrained situations (increased staff/patient ratios)
 - Feeling distracted and not fully present
 - The physical demands of working while wearing PPE (creates barriers to communication)

Dr. Josée L. Jarry



- Dr. Josée L. Jarry is an associate professor in the Adult Clinical programme of the University of Windsor.

Managing moral distress

- Moral distress occurs when one:
 - Is uncertain about the correct moral choice
 - Fails to adhere to one's own moral principle
 - Is prevented from behaving according to one's principles
- Situations that violate our own moral values
- Threat to our image of who we are
- Important values
 - The well being of the patient
 - The well being of the CHP

Managing moral distress



- Self-regulation practices
 - Mindfulness: how to relate to one's own thoughts
- Seek empathy
 - Feelings associated with moral violations are intense
 - Also very personal, unique to each person
 - What is morally distressing varies btw people
 - Find someone who will listen to you
 - Not "talk at you"
- Offer empathy
 - Listen to your colleagues
 - Offer support
 - Be curious, interested
- Only moral people suffer from moral distress 😊

Managing moral distress



Contact us:

- *COVID-19 brief therapy service*
- *Psychological Services and research Centre (PSRC)*
- *26 highly trained clinical psychology graduate student/therapists*
- *Supervised by 4 registered psychologists*
- *Up to 4 free teletherapy sessions*
- *Therapy manual developed specifically for COVID-19 related distress*
- *One module specially designed for moral distress*
- *(519) 973-7012*
- <https://www.uwindsortherapy.com/>

How can leaders support HCP?



- Promote strong teamwork
- Be visible, available and supportive
- Clear communication
- Prioritization of workload
- Extra effort to acknowledge strengths in what is working, quickly intervene when it is not working
- Make sure supports are in place, actively encourage self-care
- Providing opportunities for debriefing
- When this is over, we do not return to business as usual without considering the long term needs of our workplace

How can leaders support HCP?



- *Visible Leadership*
 - Be visible, available and supportive – “*Walk the Walk*”
 - Using existing channels or create new ones to give your leader presence
 - Daily huddles
 - Encourage everyone to attend
 - Break the ice by beginning the discussion with good news that brings a positive vibe
 - Daily topic on huddle agenda
 - Allow everyone to share their experiences
 - NOT a venue to investigate issues
 - You do not need to have all the solutions all the time
- *Have a communication strategy*
 - Where you can guide staff to the resources they needs (i.e. EAP, peer support, etc.)
 - Regularly scheduled debriefs
 - Peer support groups
 - Staff wellness outlets
 - Encourage expression of concerns and fears. Listen with patience and compassion.

QUESTIONS ?