QUICK START GUIDE
Addressing Operational Stress Injuries for Infectious Public Health Crises

A Quick Start Guide for Paramedic Service Organizations

COMMIT
Cultivate a psychologically safe and healthy workplace
- Demonstrate visible leadership commitment to addressing OSI by providing the required resources and time, modeling good stress management, engaging, and supporting
- Listen to concerns and identify the needs of workers while respecting and protecting their confidentiality and privacy
- Reduce and challenge the stigma associated with OSI by taking similar measures
- Ensure that being in a high-risk situation in the workplace should not be stigmatized

COMMUNICATE
Provide clear and consistent communication
- Centralize sources of information to ensure consistent communication regarding policies and procedures related to the infectious public health crisis
- Align workers with new protocols by communicating how their mental and physical health and safety have been considered in decision-making
- At all stages of each shift, provide status during the crisis in the work environment, safety procedures, and required stress equipment
- Develop a communication plan for family members and cohabitators to build understanding and support

EDUCATE
Provide mental health and infection prevention and control training
- Psychologically prepare workers on the unique challenges that they may face during the infectious public health crisis (e.g., uncertainty, trauma, self-isolation, increased risk of infection, high volume of information)
- Provide refreshers on infection prevention and control (e.g., proper use of PPE) based on current evidence and best practices
- Keep training sessions targeted, interactive, diverse, and during paid work hours
- Provide ongoing access to mental health training

MONITOR
Detect early signs and symptoms of OSI
- Encourage workers to report early signs and symptoms of OSI and remind them of the non-punitive policies
- Monitor changes in workers’ behaviours to offer timely intervention where appropriate
- Pay attention to workers who may be particularly vulnerable, e.g., those with pre-existing OSI
- Provide a reporting path that is straightforward and respects workers’ privacy

RELEIVE
Provide opportunities for recovery and maximizing wellness
- Ensure shifts are sufficiently staffed to allow for downtime
- Schedule and assure rest breaks throughout the shift to healthy meals, water, rehydration, personal hygiene, and rest
- Allow downtime when requested (taking a shift off), and ensure sufficient recovery time between shifts whenever possible
- Designate a quiet room or area for workers to rest
- Manage sick leave by promoting the appropriate use of paramedic services through social needs and coordination with public health agencies

EVALUATE
Collect relevant data to inform program development and continuous improvement
- Collect relevant data to identify gaps, barriers, opportunities, and outcomes for continuous improvement in addressing OSI during public health crises
- Evaluate the use of mental health support services and other dedicated resources to address OSI
- Utilize a data-driven decision-making process to inform selection, development, and implementation of OSI- specific policies and procedures
- Document lessons learned to inform future planning and resource allocations

SUPPORT
Provide various types of mental health support services
- Provide various resources to support workers’ basic physical needs (e.g., adequate PPE, ability to return home), informational needs (e.g., training), and psychological needs (e.g., peer support)
- Ensure mental health support services are available to all workers
- Provide a comprehensive program to monitor workers’ health and wellbeing during the crisis and support them in navigating access to services such as social support, medical care, and groceries
- Extend mental health support services to workers’ support systems

ANTICIPATE
Plan for future infectious public health crises
- Discern learned to plan ahead and ensure all workers have access to appropriate PPE and mental health support services
- Ensure funds for mental health support services are included in emergency response budget
- Plan necessary human resources (e.g., mental health support personnel) to quickly mobilize resources to support mental health initiatives
- Ensure the organization’s emergency response plan is readily available to stakeholders, reviewed in periodic intervals (i.e., annually), and is up to date
- Conduct regular training sessions, drills, and simulated exercises devoted to decision-making and discussing the written emergency response plans

PARAMEDIC service organizations are required to provide their workforce from Operational Stress Injuries (OSI), such as post-traumatic stress disorders, moral injuries, depression, and burnout. This Quick Start Guide outlines recommendations based on Ten Organizational Elements for paramedic service organizations to address OSI during infectious public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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