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Supporting organisations to improve the psychological wellbeing of their staff during COVID-19 pandemic: Case Studies

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Abstract

Introduction:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, frontline healthcare workers and the public were deemed to be at risk of psychological harm. Organisations were encouraged to proactively protect staff and public wellbeing, through regular monitoring and support using an evidence-based approach where possible.

Case studies:

A group of 140+ health psychologists and trainee health psychologists formed a collective of researchers and practitioners - the Health Psychology Exchange (HPX) - in order to volunteer their services to health, social care, and public health organisations throughout the UK and Ireland during the pandemic. The Psychological Interventions subgroup of HPX members supported workforces with senior managers in the health, care and local authority organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 13 organisations including hospital trusts, care homes, local authorities and colleges were supported by health psychology consultants from HPX during the pandemic. Support ranged from providing reflective practice, public health messaging, psychological support initiatives, and staff engagement.

Discussion:

Client organisations felt well supported by health psychology consultants from HPX during the pandemic. Health psychology consultants were instrumental in translating high-level guidance on optimising the psychological health of staff into practice for organisations. The basis of this consultancy work will strengthen the role of health psychology consultancy to client organisations in the future.

Introduction

Frontline healthcare workers were deemed to be at significant risk of psychological harm during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom (UK) (Greenberg, Docherty, Gnanapragasam, & Wessely, 2020; Lai et al., 2020). During the pandemic, frontline healthcare workers internationally experienced fears of contamination, moral injury, disruption of supportive networks, and work stress (Holmes et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020). As UK coronavirus prevalence peaked, two third of healthcare professionals in the National Health Service (NHS) reported feeling unsupported by their hospital trust, reporting a lack of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as a cause of stress (Iqbal & Chaudhuri, 2020). Additionally, a systematic review and meta-analysis found that whilst frontline health professionals valued psychological support services, staff with the most severe mental health problems were least likely to request or receive support (Bell & Wade, 2020).

Paradoxically, Chinese healthcare staff refused psychological support as they felt they weren't