

# Front Line Junior Doctors and Mental Health Wellbeing in Covid-19

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## ABSTRACT

Amidst a global pandemic where our psychological wellbeing is paramount, Covid-19 highlighted the importance of mental health awareness at the workplace. Preliminary evidence has illustrated that depression and anxiety as well as stress were common reactions to Covid-19. Psychoeducation and psychosocial support thus is vital for vulnerable individuals, including those from high risk groups, such as the elderly and immunocompromised individuals as well as healthcare providers who are vulnerable to increased exposure from the virus.

**Keywords:** Mental health, Frontline, Doctors, Psychological wellbeing

## INTRODUCTION

Amidst a global pandemic where our psychological wellbeing is paramount, Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of mental health awareness at the workplace. Preliminary evidence has illustrated that depression and anxiety as well as stress were common reactions to Covid-19 [1]. Psychological response to a threatening outbreak is paramount in determining a population's adherence to public health guidance [2]. It has been reported that domestic abuse, depression, anxiety and substance misuse rates have increased during the pandemic, although exact figures are still pending, it is clear that the effects of Covid-19 has impacted individuals worldwide [3]. Furthermore, the psychological outcomes of lockdown restrictions and social distancing in a world that is fast paced, well-travelled and composed of individuals in need of intimate human interaction both personally and professionally, has resulted in reports of increased irritability, emotional disturbance and exhaustion [4].

Psychoeducation and psychosocial support thus is vital for vulnerable individuals, including those from high risk groups, such as the elderly and immunocompromised individuals as well as healthcare providers who are vulnerable to increased exposure from the virus [1,3-6]. In addition, the term 'moral injury' has been utilized to describe the possible outcomes associated with healthcare professionals working amid a pandemic. The lack thereof of psychological and emotional support during a challenging experience can essentially determine their mental state following the event. This is an extremely important notion to consider when discussing mental health during Covid-19 [7].

In June 2020, I took it upon myself to start an initiative about

mental health at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, King's Lynn, a District General Hospital (DGH) in Norfolk. Alongside Clinical Psychologist Dr Louise Robinson, we formulated a 20-minute Question and Answer (Q and A) video regarding mental health at the workplace and this was followed by a survey to research the effects of this video on our viewers. Our Q and A video explored a number of issues surrounding mental health at the workplace. An important topic that we discussed was coping strategies for key workers as well as useful resources such as apps, websites and where to seek advice and help. We concluded our video Q and A by providing useful contact details for our staff as well as briefly touching on First Aid Psychology Training. This video was released on a number of social media platforms for easy access by our clinical and non-clinical NHS staff.

Following the making of this video, I felt it would be useful to gather responses from our viewers, to understand their take on the video and whether our goal for the purpose of this video, 'to raise awareness,' was actually successful. This survey consisted of 5 questions; whether our viewers have been affected by mental health at work, where to seek mental health advice at work, the quality of the video service in raising awareness and whether they would recommend this service to a friend or colleague. The survey was concluded with a question asking our viewers if they had any further comments or suggestions that they wished to volunteer.

Please follow link to access full Q and A video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW0h-UJCvq4>

## METHODOLOGY

The video Q and A was created using Microsoft Teams with a

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duration of just under 20 minutes. In order to gather people's views regarding the video, a survey was created which was both short and easy to follow, taking an average of 50 seconds to complete on Survey Monkey. The purpose of the survey was to assess whether viewers have been personally affected by mental health at the workplace and whether they knew where to seek help and advice. Following its release to the audience, which included both medical and non-medical respondents, we received a total of 20 responses with much engagement in the 'comments' section.

### Survey questions

1. Has your mental health ever been affected whilst at work?
2. Do you know where to seek mental health advice at work?
3. How would you rate the quality of the video service in raising awareness?
4. How likely is it that you would recommend this service to a friend or colleague?
5. Do you have any other comments?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Q and A video which was released on social media platforms at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube has had almost 200 views and was very well received. Our survey yielded 20 responses with some very positive feedback. The results of our survey illustrated that 85% of workers reported that their mental health was affected whilst at work. 50% of respondents stated that they did not know where to seek mental health advice at work. Furthermore, a total of 90% of respondents rated our video service as 'High Quality' in raising awareness about mental health and 60% reported that they were 'Extremely Likely' and the remaining 40% 'Likely' to recommend this service to a friend or colleague. Various respondents who participated in the survey had some very encouraging feedback regarding the video, reporting that it was 'an excellent video,' 'amazing,' and a 'great way of raising awareness.' Another important statement which is important to highlight is that one viewer felt that our video 'allows the breakdown of this barrier,' referring to the 'stigma' associated with mental health. Furthermore, it was very encouraging that a respondent felt our video 'was very relevant to current issues that can be faced whilst working in the NHS during this climate'[8].

## CONCLUSION

Our survey illustrated the importance of raising awareness about mental health at the workplace, highlighting that many workers do not actually know where to seek further support to enhance their psychological well-being. A staggering 85% admitted that their mental health has been affected whilst at work, thus illustrating the vitality of this subject within the NHS. Furthermore, the study indicated that a Video Q and A goes a very long way in raising awareness, particularly for NHS workers at the front line fighting a pandemic. Covid-19 raised a number of mental health

concerns and this survey clearly illustrates that a large proportion of individuals suffer from mental health, but some suffer silently and do not know where to seek further support.

Following this initiative, I took the time to reflect on our project and there are a number of recommendations that I would advise health care providers to consider. I strongly believe that mental health training and education at the workplace, such as First Aid Psychology Training is vital not only for healthcare professionals but also managers and leaders in health. This ensures that psychological health is thoroughly explored at multiple levels so that individuals are experienced in managing any given situation that they may be presented with. Recommendations that I suggest are that healthcare providers emphasize the importance of 'protecting' the mental health of their employees and dedicate time into improving their services so that individuals clearly know where to seek help. In addition, 'drop-in sessions' from a clinical psychologist has yielded positive results and as a health care professional I can certainly say this is a very comforting experience during times of high pressure at work.

Although a small study, the results of this initiative in addition to the literature further highlight that front-line key workers such as healthcare professionals are vulnerable to the moral injuries of a global pandemic. In conclusion, the future implications of this study are that hospitals and places of work must commit to enhancing their mental health services specifically for staff, in order to optimize their working environment, as mental health is and continues to be an important topic of discussion.

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