COVID-19 Crisis Leadership at the Frontline

Office of Well-Being

Prepared by: George S. Everly, Jr., PhD; Albert W. Wu, MD, MPH; Carolyn J. Cumpsty-Fowler, PhD, MPH; Deborah Dang, PhD, RN   © 2020 Johns Hopkins Medicine. All rights reserved.

Leader's reflection: How can I use this information in my role?

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In Harm's Way
A Psychological Perspective

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The COVID-19 pandemic requires that we put our people in harm's way, where they are susceptible to risk of infection, distress and psychological injury.

This is accelerating the risk for health care worker burnout.

If we are unable to minimize the psychological trauma, in the short-term, health care worker well-being and resilience will be eroded, and absenteeism will increase. This could threaten our ability to maintain the workforce needed for patient care.

In the long term it could lead to chronic burnout, PTSD, other mental health disability, as well as exacerbating pre-existing mental health conditions.

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Research tells us that psychological "casualties" always exceed physical casualties in the wake of disaster.

Observations range 4 - 50:1

Research indicates 25-30% of those directly affected by an event could benefit from acute psychological support.

KEY POINTS:

- Recognize that psychological distress is expected and will be more prevalent than generally anticipated.
- Understand that stress at work may carry over to home.
- Don't assume that people are doing well simply because they are not complaining.
- Don't assume that home life is going well because work is going well.

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Goal

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To enhance well-being and resilience at the organizational and personal levels at Johns Hopkins Medicine by supporting our workforce, and by strengthening crisis leadership at the executive and frontline leadership level.

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Learning Objectives

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1. Recognize the Phases of Psychological Response to the COVID-19 crisis

2. Apply evidence-based principles for communicating and leading during the COVID-19 crisis

3. Know that the COVID-19 situation requires leaders and frontline managers to model these crisis management and communication behaviors consistently

4. Introduce resources available to support leaders and frontline managers to apply these principles and practices
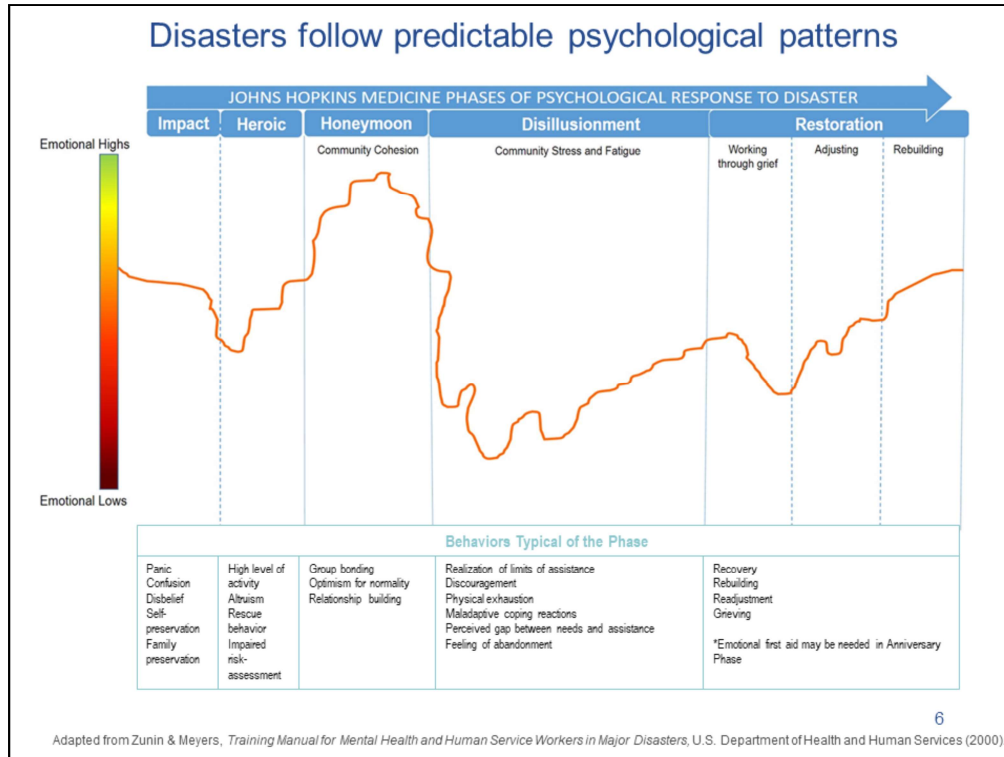
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KEY POINTS:

- Effective leadership during crisis situations requires specific and structured communications.

- Do not underestimate the range of psychological distress that may compromise:

    - your team's ability to function effectively

    - patient and staff safety

    - this organization's mission.

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Disasters follow predictable psychological patterns

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Impact	Heroic	Honeymoon	Disillusionment	Restoration		
		Community Cohesion	Community Stress and Fatigue	Working through grief	Adjusting	Rebuilding

Emotional Highs

Emotional Lows

Behaviors Typical of the Phase

Panic Confusion Disbelief Self-preservation Family preservation	High level of activity Altruism Rescue behavior Impaired risk-assessment	Group bonding Optimism for normality Relationship building	Realization of limits of assistance Discouragement Physical exhaustion Maladaptive coping reactions Perceived gap between needs and assistance Feeling of abandonment	Recovery Rebuilding Readjustment Grieving *Emotional first aid may be needed in Anniversary Phase

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Adapted from Zunin & Meyers, *Training Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters,* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000).

KEY POINTS:

- Remember, even though disasters seem chaotic, they follow a predictable psychological response trajectory.

- Recognize that knowing this empowers leaders to anticipate adverse psychological and behavioral reactions and assure staff receive timely and appropriate psychological support.

- Listen to and observe staff behaviors as these signal their progression through the phases of disaster.

- Recognize that staff may be in different phases of psychological response.

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The 4 Pillars of Resilient Leadership in Times of Crisis

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Express a hopeful vision for the future	Be decisive	Use structured communication that is timely, transparent and truthful	Model behaviors that foster trust

Research and expert consensus suggest these foundational behaviors allow leaders to better influence personal, team and organizational resilience during a crisis.

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KEY POINTS:

- Practice tenacious optimism. Have a vision, develop a plan, and share it
- Act decisively. As Patton noted the only failure in leadership is the failure to lead.
- Use focused messages that are clear and concise.
- Fostering and preserving trust is essential:
  Trust builds the bridge between the business need for results and the human need for connection. Drs. Dennis and Michelle Reina

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10 Principles of Crisis Leadership

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➢ Apply to all levels of leadership

➢ Across all organizational settings

➢ Inform leadership decision-making

➢ Guide situationally-specific action

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KEY POINTS:

• Ask leaders and managers who report to you to suggest how they will apply the principle in their leadership roles and setting.

• Remember you may already be implementing many of these recommendations in your setting.

• Ask: "How do we sustain what we're doing well?

• Ask: "How can we harness what we do well to enhance areas where we need improvement?

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1. Structure is the antidote to chaos

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Why is this important now?
Plans and routines create a sense of continuity and comfort

Suggested leadership actions:
– Make sure everyone knows the plan
– Hold daily briefings and team huddles as needed

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DO:
- Present the plan and expectations for the positive outcomes that will result
- Include a "huddle" (small group discussion) at the beginning or end of each shift to discuss the most significant events of the shift.
- Include these four questions in conversations:
    1. What went well?
    2. What were the challenges, the worst part?
    3. What did you learn?
    4. How can we take what we do well and apply it to solve current problems?
- Maintain as many existing routines as possible.

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2. Listen before you speak

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Why is this important now?

Stress, fear and anxiety interfere with people's ability to reason and to follow even the most logical guidance

Suggested leadership actions:

– Provide opportunities for staff to voice their personal and professional concerns
– Ask open-ended questions

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DO:

- *Listen* with the intent to *understand*, not with the intent to reply.
- Notice if other people's stress, fear and anxiety is compromising your ability to listen. Use mindfulness techniques to stay grounded and focused.
- Allow people to vent. This helps them re-establish more deliberative thinking and increases adherence to direction.
- Listen with curiosity to what is said and not said.
- Ask open-ended question (what do you think is happening?)
- Validate and redirect respectfully when necessary if comments become counterproductive.

DON'T:

- Let the conversation spiral out of control.

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3. Information is the antidote for anxiety

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Why is this important now?
Information can reassure and empower

Suggested leadership actions:
– Provide appropriate guidance
– Use this four-step structure when crafting a crisis communication
1. What happened?
2. Cause
3. Reactions (physical, psychological)
4. What is being done to remedy the situation

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DO:

- Provide three types of guidance, as appropriate:

  1. What may happen (anticipatory guidance)

  2. What happened and why it happened (explanatory guidance)

  3. Recommendations or mandates for action (prescriptive guidance)

- Provide information on resources that will support people to take the action.

DON'T:

- Assume all staff are equally well-informed.

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4. Empowerment is the antidote for feeling powerless and out of control

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Why is this important now?

Most people do not want to be taken care of, they want to be empowered to take care of themselves

Suggested leadership actions:

– Provide guidance on resilience, stress management and well-being
– Ask your staff about their effective strategies and encourage sharing among the team

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DO:

- Make sure your people know how to access resources to support them to:
    - Have their questions answered
    - Work safely and effectively
    - Promote and preserve their physical and psychological wellbeing

- Share your strategies for maintaining or improving your wellbeing

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DO:

- Practice what you preach (or "walk your talk").

- Share bad news as well as good.

- Explain when a new directive contradicts an older one.

- Model self-care behaviors.

    - Take breaks without guilt.

- Be kind and constructive in your feedback

DON'T:

- Shame anyone

- Criticize publicly

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6. Perceived support is the antidote for isolation

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Why is this important now?

Interpersonal support is the best predictor of resilience in times of crisis

Suggested leadership actions:

– Be visible. Walk among the troops
– Protect time to be available to staff
– Informally monitor the psychological pulse of your unit
– Use as many channels as possible to assure staff have information about support resources

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DO:

- Encourage the use of available resources.

- Defuse conflict quickly.

- Remember fear and fatigue erode usual coping mechanisms, so people are more likely to over react to otherwise minor challenges.

- Encourage staff to reach out to others to create mutual support plans.

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7. Cohesive groups do better in times of stress and challenge

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Why is this important now?

Cohesive groups do better with stress and challenges in times of crisis

Suggested leadership actions:

– Provide structured opportunities for connection (e.g., huddles, and reflecting on shared success)
– Look for informal opportunities to connect
– Use inclusive language (i.e., we, us, our)
– Acknowledge and appreciate team work and connectedness
– Remind people they are part of something greater than themselves

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DO:

- Remind people they are part of an institutional legacy of excellence and compassion.

- Provide opportunity to connect and share thoughts about strengths as well as challenges (use four questions from Principle 1).

- Challenge "us vs them" thinking.

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8. There is no such thing as an information vacuum

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Why is this important now?
Keep in mind that if leaders are not communicating others are; usually the most distressed.

Suggested leadership actions:
- Provide information at scheduled intervals to all members of the team
- Provide information in advance of a change in practice or routine, whenever feasible
- Share information in plain language and through various channels to make sure everyone gets it
- Stay current with social media regarding concerns, rumors, as well as shared experiences, positive and negative

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DO:

- Ask "what are you hearing?"

- Understand there will always be distortions, catastrophizing, and counter-productive rumors.

- Do you best to monitor informal communication networks.

- Recognize that there are many competing sources of information.

DON'T:

- Assume that because you have provided information, people have received it or accepted it.

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9. Transparent, timely, and truthful communication is essential to credibility

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Why is this important now?

Leadership credibility predicts trust. Trust begins and ends with truth. Trust predicts cooperation and compliance.

Suggested leadership actions:

– Communicate in a timely manner
– Anticipate questions and answer them in advance
– Repetition is useful (3 times is recommended)
– If you don't know, say so

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DO:

- Recognize that trust takes years to build, moments to destroy, and a lifetime to repair.

- Remember people remember what they hear first and what they hear last.

- Admit what you don't know and also say when you can provide the information.

- Be transparent about the information you use to inform decisions.

- Invite questions in advance of briefings, townhalls, etc.

- Provide recordings of important meetings so everyone has access to the same information.

DON'T:

- Repeat messages too many times. You may sound pedantic or annoying and people stop listening.

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10. The moment of absolute certainty may never arise

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Why is this important now?

The most egregious failure in leadership is waiting too long to act

Suggested leadership actions:

– Be decisive
– Emphasize that this is an evolving situation
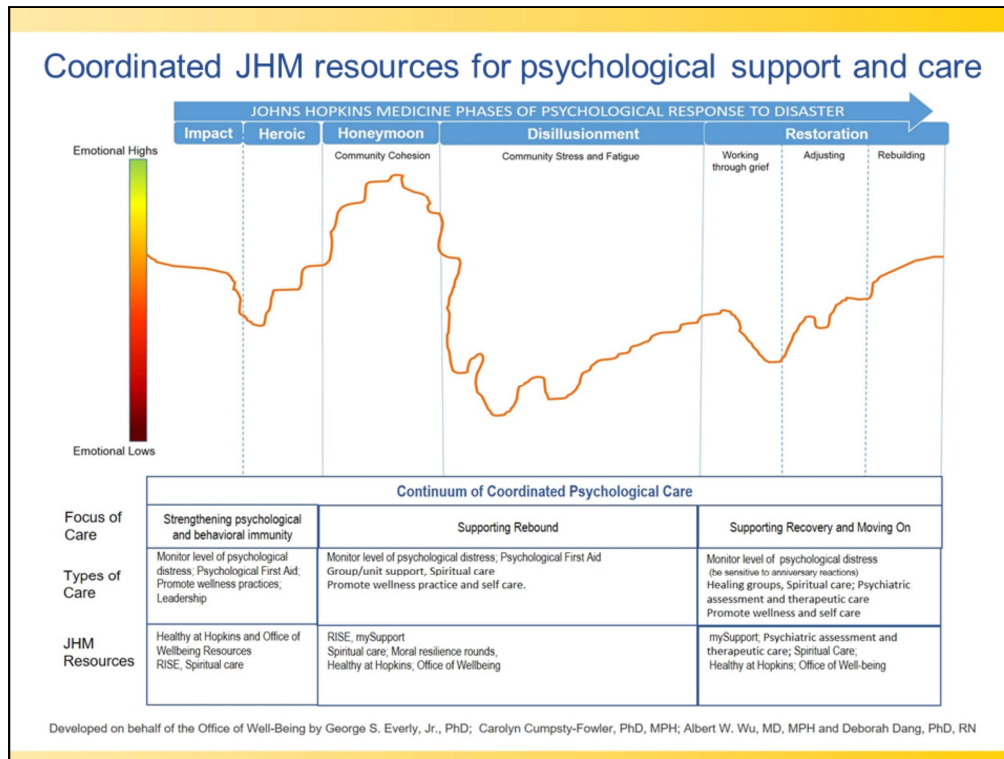– Explain updates and communicate them regularly

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DO:

- Plan for the "long haul."

- Recognize that decisive action needs to be calm, thoughtful and values-based.

- Remember that when fearful, confused, and angry, people look to leadership for guidance.

    - Absent leadership, they impulsively strive for acute self-preservation without consideration of long-term consequences. This can be detrimental in the long-run.

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Coordinated JHM resources for psychological support and care

Developed on behalf of the Office of Well-Being by George S. Everly, Jr., PhD; Carolyn Cumpsty-Fowler, PhD, MPH; Albert W. Wu, MD, MPH and Deborah Dang, PhD, RN

Resource links:

1. **Supporting Health and Well-Being resources on the JHM internal COVID-19 internal resources portal**

https://covid19.insidehopkinsmedicine.org/#faculty-support

 2. **JHM Office of Well-Being website**

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/joy-at-jhm/office-of-well-being/index.html

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DO:

- Involve staff to identify practices that will fit well in their practice setting. This is important to foster team empowerment, connections and cohesion.

- Encourage staff to access the resources available through the Office of Well-Being: https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/joy-at-jhm/office-of-well-being/ or to submit a question about crisis leadership to owb@jhmi.edu

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Resources to support application of the 10 principles

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If you would like to learn more about applying these crisis leadership principles in practice

– Download the PDF notes version of this session that contains practical application tips
– Watch the *Applying Crisis Leadership Principles* series: one short video for each principle
– Attend virtual office hours (by appointment)

Access all these resources on the Office of Well-Being's website:

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/joy-at-jhm/office-of-well-being

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We hope to hear from you

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E-mail your questions, comments, suggestions to

OWB@jhmi.edu

Nurse leaders, please add "Nursing" as the first word in the subject line: Nursing—(insert topic)

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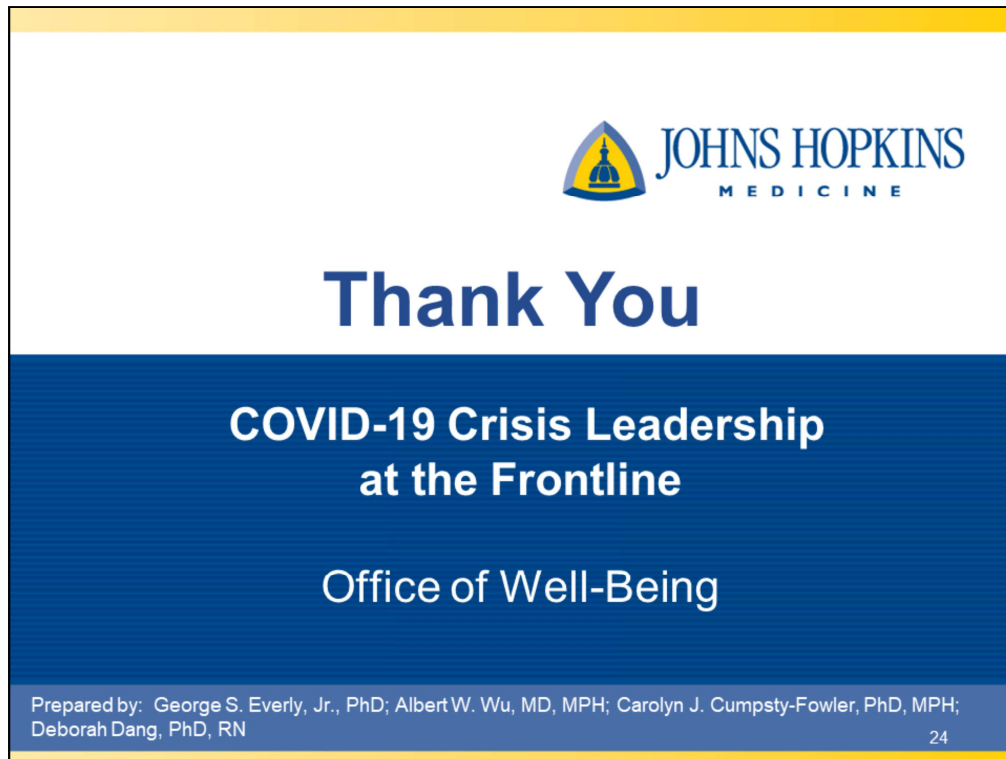
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