

Supporting Deployed Staff, Trainees and Faculty, and Those Working with Unfamiliar Patient Populations

Guidance for Frontline Leaders Holding Check-in Conversations during COVID-19

PURPOSE

To provide frontline leaders a structured process for checking-in with staff, trainees and faculty deployed to other units or working in unfamiliar roles or with different patient populations.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When we ask staff, faculty and trainees to deploy to other units or care for an unfamiliar patient population, they may experience fear or worry related to several factors:

1. Perceived increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 positive patients that may influence their own safety and that of their families.
2. Concern that they do not have the clinical skills needed to provide safe care.
3. Unfamiliarity with the new setting: layout of the unit, workflow, unit staff, unit culture, etc.
4. Separation from their home unit and colleagues which may reduce perception of interpersonal support

Checking in with staff, trainees and faculty regularly using a strengths-focused format sends a clear message that you support and care about them. It also gives deployed staff, trainees and faculty an opportunity to remain connected to their home team by sharing their experiences and insights.

RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE

1. **Connect:** Ask how they are doing personally: physically and emotionally
2. **Identify successes and strengths:** Ask them about what is going well and the areas where they feel they are successful and comfortable
3. **Identify challenges:** Screen for any logistical or skill-related challenges they have encountered
4. **Gather their insights:** Ask them to share any learnings they think are important to pass on to their colleagues
5. **Offer support:** Ask what they need: professionally and personally
6. **Acknowledge professional and personal commitment:** Affirm the work they have done and express gratitude

Please remind them that there are people who can provide support through **mySupport** (443-997-7000, Option #2) or **RISE** (pager: 410-283-3953 or CORUS: JHH RISE Team) or **Spiritual Care** (pager: 410-434-0909 or CORUS: JHH Chaplain). The **Office of Well-Being** has many resources to support well-being (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/joy-at-jhm/office-of-well-being>), as does **Healthy at Hopkins** (https://intranet.insidehopkinsmedicine.org/jhhs_human_resources/docs/COVID-19_documents/healthy-at-hopkins-support-flyer.pdf).

POSSIBLE SCRIPTING

These are suggestions for each of the six steps. We encourage you to make them your own, using language that feels comfortable to you and the staff member, trainee or faculty. Wherever possible, use open-ended questions and personalize your acknowledgment and gratitude.

1. "How are you?"
If appropriate: "You've been dealing with some situations/events that are not a part of your usual practice, how are you feeling physically/emotionally?"

If possible, check about their self-care and wellbeing (at work and at home) e.g., sleep, healthy food, movement, time with family and friends.
2. "As you look back (on this last shift/ last week) what are things you can identify that went well? Where did you feel successful? These could be big or they could be small. When did you feel most comfortable?"
3. "I know [name of unit/patient population] is an unfamiliar area for you to work in. Could you tell me about any challenges [logistical or skills] you've experienced?"

If there are concerns, follow up by asking whether they have/had support in addressing these on the unit. If not, share that you will try and help address their concerns using the appropriate channels.
4. "What sort of things (procedures, workflow, practice differences, communication) have you learned that it would be good to share with our team/colleagues?"
5. "What resources are you using to help you cope with what you're experiencing?"; "What do you need to support you?"; "What would be helpful/useful?"
6. "Thank you for extending yourself to do this work in this way. You have helped [acknowledge what they've been giving/doing and the impact it's made to patients and colleagues]."

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FROM FRONTLINE MANAGERS:

- Wearing PPE can become uncomfortable during a long shift. Acknowledge that.
- Always acknowledge the fear of the unknown. It can be the worst part.
- Acknowledge what isn't working and change it. Involve your staff in the decision-making process.
- Practice answering these questions yourself; it helps move you into a more positive mindset.
- It's so easy for us to become task-laden and focused on problem solving that we lose sight of the employee and his/her emotional wellbeing. What I like about these questions is they are connected to the experience and uncertainty that's faced in deployment or caring for COVID-19 patients.
- I find these questions relevant and compassionate. I felt very comfortable following this guidance while speaking with my team members. They enjoyed being asked, and heard.
- I used this question format in-person, by email, on virtual calls, individually and in groups. It works and the insights deployed staff have shared with their colleagues have been helpful and appreciated.

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