Supporting your team during a global pandemic

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Q I'm feeling overwhelmed and overstressed during this unprecedented time as I try to keep my team focused while worrying about my own health and safety. What can leaders do to help support our teams?

First and foremost, you aren't alone in feeling this way! We're all experiencing varying levels of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty in this difficult time. Here are a few ways to help you cope with short- and long-term challenges associated with the COVID-19 response.

Practice complete transparency with your team. We're all learning as we go. None of us has the experience leading teams through a global pandemic. When teams have high anxiety and uncertainty, they need information, reassurance, and guidance. Even if you don't have all the answers, it's always better to overcommunicate and provide what information you do have. It's also important to communicate in an open, honest, and direct way. If you don't know something, say so. If a process is likely to change frequently, be upfront about that and prepare staff as much as possible for what may be coming next, even if you're unsure.

To care for others, you must care for yourself. I've worked more consecutive days and hours than I can keep track of—all of us have. The days are running together, and every day seems to be met with a new, unprecedented challenge. We all want to believe that we're machines with superhuman powers, but this simply isn't the case. All of us are working with our frontline teams to ensure that they're eating, sleeping, and getting breaks during their long and tiring shifts, and it's just as important that we do the same for ourselves. As nurses, self-care may feel selfish or unnatural, but giving yourself permission to practice self-care, self-love, self-forgiveness, and self-compassion allows you to recharge and renew so you're able to be fully present and engaged to lead your team through our new reality.

You can't be everything to everyone so for everyone's sake, please stop trying! The best leaders demonstrate high levels of self-awareness and emotional intelligence, especially in a crisis. Knowing your limits and asking for help are signs of strength, not weakness. Perhaps you

need some time away and ask a colleague to cover your unit or maybe you need help with keeping your team motivated; whatever it is, you shouldn't have to go at this alone. Find colleagues or friends who can be a safe space to share your thoughts, feelings, and needs. We're all so much stronger together!

Celebrate successes no matter how big or small. There are so many stories of compassion, kindness, and selflessness during this global response and many of them are happening in your own organization. Find them, share them, and celebrate them. There's nothing more motivating than celebrating these moments when things may seem bleak and somewhat hopeless overall. In my organization, teams are making signs and posters to motivate and recognize their coworkers. These started showing up randomly all over the hospital and they're added to on an almost daily basis. We're using social media to recognize our amazing team of clinicians and reassure the public that we're prepared and ready to care for them in their time of need. Each day I remind staff members to submit pictures, videos, and stories that show how they're caring for each other and this has created a movement centered in compassion and love unlike anything I've ever seen in my career.

Spread gratitude like it's going out of style! There will never be enough ways for you to say thank you to the people who are making it happen on the frontlines. Whether it's an unexpected thank-you note sent to an employee's home or a simple "thank you" as you're rounding, make time for recognition amidst the chaos. Of all the things I miss, being able to hug people is what I miss the most. When the time comes, there will be lots of hugs and I hope this gives you hope for what's to come. Thank you for all you're doing to lead our nation's nursing teams through this challenging time. We've got this! **NM**

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