

## WHO-T2-MEASURES TO PROTECT THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF MEDICAL WORKERS



# World Health Organization

### **CONTENTS**

- I. Introduction
  - a. Introduction to the committee
  - b. Introduction to the topic
- II. History of the topic
- III. Current Issues
- IV. Past actions (by the UN or other authorities)
- V. Possible considerations for the future
- VI. Conclusion
- VII. Useful Links

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. WHO is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland and was established on April 7, 1948. It consists of 194 member states and two associate members. The organization is governed by the World Health Assembly, which meets annually and is attended by delegations from all member states.

Its primary objective is to ensure that people around the world enjoy the highest possible level of health. The organization is responsible for a wide range of activities,

including disease control and prevention, health promotion, and emergency response. The WHO is also responsible for coordinating the global response to pandemics and other health emergencies, and for providing technical assistance and support to countries in need.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC**

Around the world, there are 136 million individuals working in the health and social work sector, with roughly 70% of these workers being female. It is important that all these workers have access to decent work, which includes measures to protect their health and safety in the workplace. Ensuring that health workers are provided with adequate occupational health and safety measures is critical for creating resilient and well-functioning health systems, maintaining a productive health workforce, and delivering high-quality care. Health workers are exposed to a variety of risks associated with their work, including biological, chemical, physical, ergonomic, and psychosocial hazards that can impact both their safety and the safety of their patients.

The health and well-being of healthcare workers is an important issue that requires attention and action. While healthcare workers play a critical role in caring for patients, they are also exposed to a range of physical and mental health risks because of their work. These risks can have a negative impact on their overall health and well-being and may increase the risk of conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. To address these risks, it is important for healthcare organizations to provide support and resources to help workers manage stress, prevent injuries, and maintain their physical and mental health. By prioritizing the health and well-being of healthcare workers, we can help to ensure that they are able to provide high-quality care to patients over the long term.

## **HISTORY**

Not only was the COVID-19 pandemic accompanied by massive personal restrictions and losses, but health care workers worldwide also had to cope with the extreme circumstances the pandemic brought with. Psychologically, staff suffered enormous damage. A very high mortality rate, the ingratitude of the outside world and the fear of becoming ill themselves and possibly infecting relatives and friends caused anxiety disorders, burn out and depression in many nurses. Added to this is the excessive stress caused by the overburdening of the healthcare system. However, healthcare workers are exposed to major hurdles and dangers not only psychologically, but also physically. In their constant contact with ill and vulnerable people, employees constantly run the risk of contracting dangerous viruses and becoming seriously ill. For example, according to a WHO estimate, approximately 115,000 caregivers worldwide have died from COVID-19.

## **CURRENT ISSUES**

The physical and mental health of medical workers has become a growing concern in recent years, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are some current issues related to this topic:

1. **Burnout:** Medical workers, including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, are at high risk of burnout due to the long hours, high workload, and emotional demands of their jobs. Burnout can lead to physical and mental health problems, reduced productivity, and high staff turnover rates. Burnout can have serious consequences for medical workers, patients, and healthcare systems, including:
  - a) **Reduced quality of care:** Burnout can lead to medical errors, reduced quality of care, and lower patient satisfaction.
  - b) **Increased risk of medical errors:** Medical workers who are burned out may be more prone to making mistakes and errors in judgment, which can have serious consequences for patient safety.
  - c) **High staff turnover rates:** Burnout can lead to high staff turnover rates, which can be costly for healthcare systems and disrupt continuity of care.
  - d) **Negative impact on physical and mental health:** Burnout can have serious physical and mental health consequences for medical workers, including increased risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders.
2. **Workplace violence:** Medical workers are also at risk of workplace violence, including verbal abuse, physical assaults, and even homicide. Violence in the workplace can cause physical injuries, mental trauma, and long-term psychological harm. To address workplace violence among medical workers, it is important to implement policies and procedures that promote a safe and supportive work environment.
3. **Infectious disease exposure:** Medical workers are at higher risk of exposure to infectious diseases, including COVID-19, which can cause serious illness and even death. Many medical workers have reported shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), which can increase the risk of infection.
4. **Stigma and discrimination:** Medical workers, particularly those working in infectious disease control, have been subject to stigma and discrimination due to fears of contagion. This can cause psychological distress and may discourage healthcare workers from seeking care when needed.
5. **Staff shortages:** Many countries are facing shortages of medical staff, including doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. The consequences of staff shortages can be severe, including increased patient wait times, reduced quality of care, and increased medical errors. Staff shortages can also lead to increased

staff turnover, which can further exacerbate the problem by reducing the overall pool of experienced medical workers.

These issues highlight the need for increased attention and support for the physical and mental health of medical workers.

## **PAST ACTIONS**

There have been various actions taken by the United Nations (UN) and other countries to protect the physical and mental health of medical workers. Some of these actions include:

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched the "Health Worker Safety Charter" to provide guidance and best practices for protecting the physical and mental health of medical workers. The charter calls for measures such as providing adequate personal protective equipment, providing access to mental health resources, and promoting a culture of safety and respect in healthcare settings.
2. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2020 calling for increased efforts to protect the health and safety of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution recognized the importance of providing medical workers with adequate resources, including personal protective equipment, training, and mental health support.
3. In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued guidelines for protecting medical workers from workplace violence, including recommendations for implementing workplace violence prevention programs and providing training and education on recognizing and preventing violence.
4. In Canada, the federal government has launched the "Healthy Workforce Initiative" to support the mental health and well-being of healthcare workers. The initiative provides resources and support for addressing workplace stress, burnout, and mental health issues.
5. In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service (NHS) has launched the "NHS Staff and Learners' Mental Wellbeing Commission" to examine the mental health and well-being of medical workers. The commission is tasked with developing recommendations for improving mental health support and promoting a positive work culture in healthcare settings.

## **CONSIDERATION FOR THE FUTURE**

The problem of mental and physical stress on healthcare workers should be addressed at its root. A basic awareness of the performance of the nursing staff should be triggered among the population. In addition, an emergency plan should be developed to better handle situations such as COVID-19, which should cover all areas of care if possible. To be able to cover a mass shortage of nursing staff, a mandatory nursing emergency service could be introduced, in which laypersons are called up to cover the shortage of staff, like conscription.

## **CONCLUSION**

The health and well-being of healthcare workers is an important issue that requires attention and action. While healthcare workers play a critical role in caring for patients, they are also exposed to a range of physical and mental health risks because of their work. These risks can have a negative impact on their overall health and well-being and may increase the risk of conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. To address these risks, it is important for healthcare organizations to provide support and resources to help workers manage stress, prevent injuries, and maintain their physical and mental health. By prioritizing the health and well-being of healthcare workers, we can help to ensure that they are able to provide high-quality care to patients over the long term.

## **USEFUL LINKS**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4155035/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S253104372030088X>

<https://www.who.int/activities/protecting-health-and-safety-of-health-workers>