

# Healthcare Workers - Coping with Infectious Disease Outbreaks in the Dialysis Setting

As the Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, continues to spread throughout the U.S., with daily reports of new confirmed cases, we are all experiencing a wide range of thoughts, feelings and reactions. It is normal to experience emotional distress and conflicting feelings when called upon to provide life-sustaining care during a disease outbreak.

## Some common reactions:

- Guilt in leaving your facility understaffed if personally exhibiting symptoms
- Ethically torn to provide services yet worried about your own safety and that of your family
- Intense physical and mental stress, such as:
  - Anxiety, worry, panic
  - Grief over loss of a patient
  - Feeling helpless
  - Social withdrawal
  - Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
  - Anger
  - Hypervigilance to your health and body
  - Physical reactions such as headaches, body pain, stomach problems and skin rashes
- Having to work extended hours, sometimes at a location other than normal, inundated with triage, and performing some duties that are not part of your normal job description

## For managers of dialysis facilities, here are some ways to help your staff:

- Maintain sensitivity to individual responses to stress
- Offer opportunities to talk about feelings
- Encourage team members to support one another by checking in periodically
- Refer staff for help with counseling as needed

It is important that you take care of yourself. Some key coping tips:

- As much as possible, maintain a healthy diet, exercise and sleep
- Though you want to stay informed, stick to credible sources for information, such as the CDC
- Take a break from the news and focus on today and things that are positive in your life and that you can control
- Talk to loved ones who are supportive – use Skype or FaceTime if you are not able to talk to them in person
- If you are coping with the loss of a patient, process your emotions with another empathic nurse or social worker
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs
- Relax your body - Take deep breaths, stretch, meditate or pray
- Make time for fun and laugh as much as you can
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking
- Seek help when needed

## Helpful Resources:

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline provides crisis counseling 24/7 and is confidential  
Call **800-985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs** to **66746**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disater-distress-helpline>

HHS Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health:  
Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation During  
an Infectious Disease Outbreak

<https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf>