Workshop 3: Supporting yourselves and each other

The last person to recognise stress is the person you see in the mirror

The negative impact of stress is well documented. It has become an increasingly important issue in the workplace. Because of the pressures of work, it is something that often does not get discussed and yet it is those very pressures which can create stress. The potential for stress within hospitals is higher than in many occupations and higher still within Oncology and Palliative Care. Receiving emotional support is important in all our lives but particularly important when working with children with cancer where stress levels can run extremely high.

Stress Points in Oncology and Palliative Care include:

- Repeated exposure to those you are caring for who are in pain, suffering and dying
- The moral and ethical dilemmas regarding treatment decisions
- The intensity and complexity of treatment and managing professional boundaries
- Working closely with emotionally fraught or grieving families
- Staff shortages and high workload

Which aspects of your work provide you with the most stress?

Good Stress
Some stress can be positive; we need a certain level of pressure to perform well. It provides stimulation to achieve creativity and innovation.

Stress Tipping Point
When the demands of the situation outweigh our perceived ability to meet those demands.

Negative Stress
The negative impact of stress can be gradual, we may often be the last person to realise we have stress. We may notice stress in others before they notice it themselves.

10 Signs of Negative Stress – take time to reflect on yourself.

- Worry and anxiety
- Sleep problems
- Lack of concentration
- Compassion fatigue
- Depression
- Poor relationships
- Extreme mood swings
- Eating difficulties
- Greater use of stimulants
- Illness

If you have one or more of these signs then you may be experiencing negative stress

Top Tips for Tackling Negative Stress

1. Establish a Mutual Support System at work

Why?
In the workplace there is a mutual dependence on each other. If one or more members of staff are absent or underperforming due to stress, then the subsequent pressure on others is likely to increase stress levels across the team.

If family and friends are unfamiliar with the emotional and traumatic nature of your work, they may be ill equipped to share your experiences with.

Mutual support networks at work can provide a platform for “offloading” the emotional burden gathered at work that can be the cause of considerable stress.

**How?**

Mutual support groups can be structured, timetabled and recognised as an important part of the work. They can take place in a variety of forms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Case study meetings</strong></th>
<th>To discuss the emotional impact of cases</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflective practice</strong></td>
<td>With colleagues, discussing what worked and did not work</td>
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<td><strong>Regular supervision</strong></td>
<td>Which includes providing positive feedback on performance</td>
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<td><strong>Immediate debriefing</strong></td>
<td>With manager or colleagues</td>
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<td><strong>End of Shift Debriefing</strong></td>
<td>Informal with colleague(s), “how was today?” Perhaps as part of shift handover</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring / Buddy System</strong></td>
<td>Peer support. Arrange for each nurse to have an allocated Buddy, who they could contact when they require support</td>
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**2. Maintain a Healthy Work – Life Balance**

Maintaining a balanced lifestyle while working under pressure is important in building a healthy level of stress fitness.

Ensure there are opportunities for:

**Relaxation**

Taking time out at work can help avoid burn out. Ensuring there are opportunities to relax outside of work.

**Interests**

Having interests unrelated to the workplace can relieve pressure. Maintain a healthy diet. This can be challenging when working long hours or when under stress.

**Exercise**

At work these can include deep breathing exercises, relaxing shoulders. Outside of work this might include going for a walk/run.
**Test your current Stress Fitness Strategies by completing this Stress Fitness Action Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Fitness Strategies</th>
<th>How often do you employ this strategy?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regularly monitor stress levels</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mutual Support System at work</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk to someone outside of work</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take regular time out’s</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relaxation (at work)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relaxation (at leisure)</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of work interests</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a well-balanced diet</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor alcohol and nicotine levels</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities – Physical Exercise</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
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The areas that I intend working on are:

If this section on supporting yourself and others is of interest and you would like to find out more, you can register your interest in the Psychosocial Support Training Package by emailing [megan.cruise@worldchildcancer.org](mailto:megan.cruise@worldchildcancer.org)

During the workshop, each team will produce a Support Plan that can be implemented in your hospital/ward to increase levels of support and resilience.