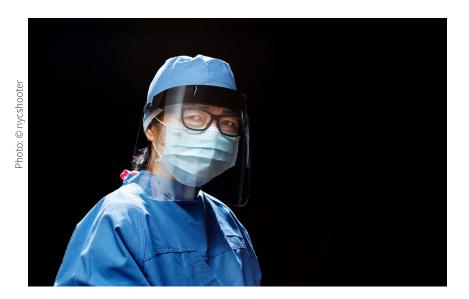**Cochrane Review of qualitative research**
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Strategies to support the mental wellbeing of frontline workers during infectious disease epidemics. **What is the effect? And what are the implementation considerations?**

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Working as a 'frontline' health or social care professional during a global disease pandemic, like COVID-19, can be very stressful. Over time, the negative effects of stress can lead to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, which, in turn, may affect work, family and other social relationships. Frontline workers can use various strategies to support their mental well-being. These could include work-based strategies, such as changing routines or improving equipment; or psychological support strategies, such as counselling.

Main results of the review

The review only found one study that measured **the effect** of these types of strategies to support mental health. This study assessed the effect of a programme to train health workers to deliver psychological first aid to people affected by Ebola virus disease. However, we don't know what effect this programme had on health workers' mental health because the certainty of this evidence was very low.

The review included 16 studies that described **factors influencing the implementation** of these types of strategies. The studies took place during outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS); Ebola; Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS); and COVID-19. The strategies used included training, structure and communication strategies; and counselling and psychology services.

Who is this summary for?

Implementation agencies, ministries of health, programme managers, healthcare facility staff, and any other stakeholders who are considering strategies to support the resilience and mental health of their frontline workers during a disease outbreak, epidemic or pandemic.

What did the review look for?

A recent Cochrane Review of mixed methods searched for studies that assessed the effects of strategies to support the resilience and mental health of frontline health and social care professionals during or after a disease outbreak, epidemic or pandemic. The review also searched for qualitative and descriptive studies describing factors influencing the implementation of these strategies.

How up-to-date was this review?

The review authors searched for studies that had been published up to May 2020.

Factors that probably influenced implementation included the knowledge and beliefs that people had about these strategies; the extent to which they were aware of what they needed to support their mental well-being; access to equipment, staff time and skills; adaptation to local needs; effective communication; and access to a positive, safe and supportive learning environment.

Questions for planners and implementers

Below is a set of questions that may help health system or programme managers when planning or implementing strategies to support frontline workers' mental health. These questions build on the findings of this review that we have moderate confidence in:

Selecting a strategy:

• Do you know enough about the mental health needs of your frontline workers and the mental health resources currently available to them?

• Can the strategy that you are considering be tailored to meet these local needs? For instance, is the strategy culturally appropriate? Can it be adapted to lower literacy levels, where this is needed?

• Do you have the equipment, staff time and skills to implement the strategy?

Planning and implementing the strategy:

• Is there clear communication and a shared understanding across all levels of the organisation about how the strategy is implemented? This includes communication between staff and leadership, and communication between colleagues

• Is there a positive, safe and supportive learning environment where frontline workers can learn new skills and strategies?

• Do frontline workers have enough knowledge about, and belief in, the strategy, including the underlying principles or rationale for the strategy, and how to implement the strategy?

Other implications for practice;

Based on findings from the review that we have low or very low confidence in, we have identified the following additional factors that may have implications for practice:

• The complexity of the intervention (low-complexity interventions may be easier to implement)

• The costs of the strategy

• Government and political leaders' awareness of mental health needs of frontline workers

• The extent to which different organisations work together in a coordinated way to implement a strategy

• The extent to which frontline workers receive incentives and rewards for participation in the strategy

• The extent to which frontline workers have access to education, training and information about the strategy

• The confidence of people delivering the strategy

• Individual personal characteristics of frontline workers, such as their attitudes and motivation

• The extent to which steps are taken to prepare individual workers and organisations prior to implementation of a new strategy that aims to address mental health issues

• Meaningful engagement of, and collaborations with, people involved in the delivery of the intervention, and opinion leaders who can champion the intervention

• The extent to which frontline workers have opportunities to reflect on the implementation of the strategy, including what is working well and what isn't

Remember that these questions are based on studies of different strategies from different settings. This means that the importance of these questions may be different in your setting.

The questions presented in this summary are from a Cochrane Review. This summary does NOT include recommendations. The review authors have searched for, assessed and summarised relevant studies using a systematic and predefined approach.

The review authors systematically assessed the level of confidence or certainty in each review finding, using GRADE to assess findings from the studies of effectiveness and GRADE-CERQual to assess findings from the qualitative and descriptive studies. They then used the review findings to develop a set of questions for implementers.