



HEALTHCARE WORKERS
CARE NETWORK

Caring for the Carers by the Carers

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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WWW.HEALTHCAREWORKERSCARENETWORK.ORG.ZA

WHY WORRY ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SOUTH AFRICAN HEALTH CARE WORKERS?

1

We have very limited numbers of healthcare workers in comparison to the population of SA

2

We need a emotionally strong working healthcare work force

3

South African health care workers were already struggling before this pandemic

4

Research from around the world indicates that Health care workers are struggling emotionally from this pandemic

PRIOR TO THIS PANDEMIC

- Mental Health of Health Care workers in South Africa prior to this pandemic was already worrying.
- High rates of Burnout – most commonly researched topic

- 2019 Study, SAMJ , *C Zeijlemaker et al*
- Looked at 170 registrars in Clinical Medicine.
- 84 % rate burnout – high Emotional exhaustion and Depersonalization scores
- Highest in emergency medicine registrars and Anesthetists
- 2015, Van der Walt et al, SAJAA - Anesthetists – public and private sector. –40% public and around 20 % pvt high levels of emotional exhaustion / burnout
- Consistently South African studies compared to more developed health care systems show high levels of burnout

WHAT MAKES COVID-19 SO DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF OUR EMOTIONAL RESPONSES?

This impacts us directly and personally

Concerns about
self

Concerns about
family and friends

Concerns about
colleagues



It is unlike other crises e.g. HIV/AIDS

COMPLETE INFORMATION OVERLOAD

WWW.COVIDCAREGAUTENG.CO.ZA





CHALLENGES FACING HCW

Traumatic Exposure

insufficient PPE, risk of infection and infecting loved ones

Moral Injury

psychological distress that results from actions or the lack of them, which violates someone's moral or ethical code

Workplace Stress

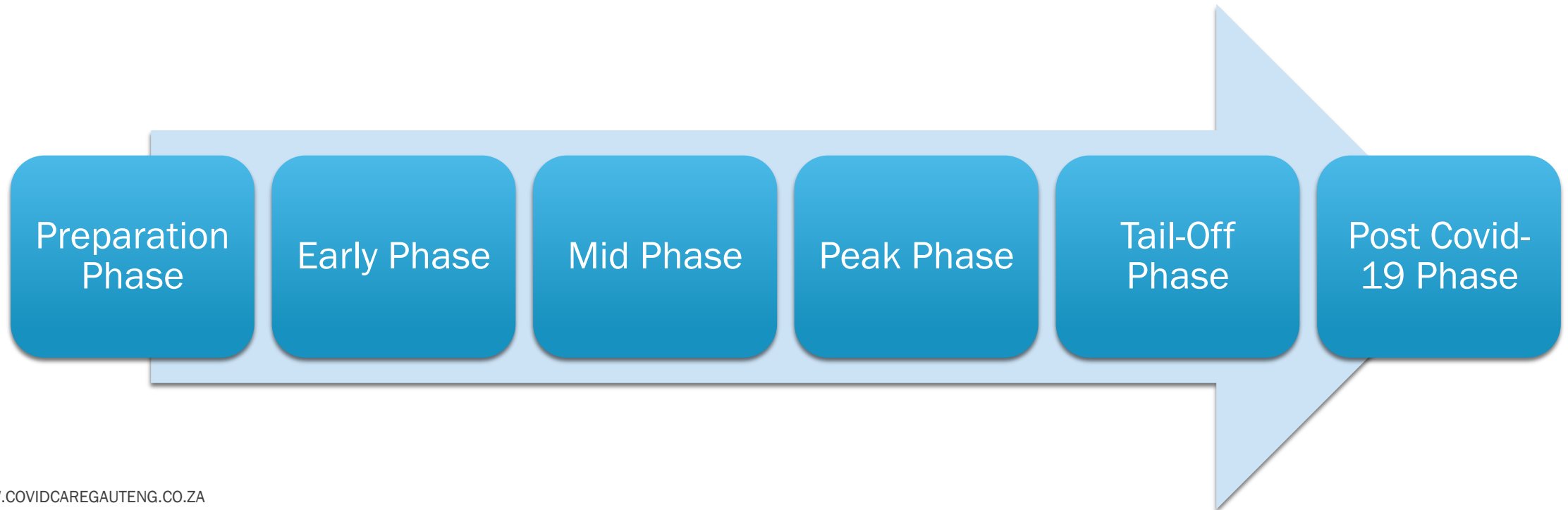
challenges of acquiring PPE, of wearing PPE for long periods of time, of making life or death decisions, long work hours

Home Stress

family and children at home – their anxieties, their needs, financial stresses

COVID-19 PHASES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH

- Useful to think of it as occurring in phases
- Each phase comes with its own challenges, common responses and possible solutions



COVID-19 PHASES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH WAVE

PREPARATION PHASE/ EARLY (small number of patients, systems cope)

- Anticipatory anxiety vs possible denial
- Overwhelmed Physical/Emotional signs of tension
- Information overload vs Lack of information
- Somatising, Roster Changes, Leave plans cancelled





COVID-19 PHASES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH WAVE

MID PHASE (many positive cases daily, insufficient equipment, covering for colleagues, challenging ethical decisions)

- Distress and worry increases
- Staff may feel unable to cope/overwhelmed
- Some on overdrive
- Starting to deplete personal reserves ‘running on empty’

COVID-19 PHASES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH WAVE

PEAK PHASE (case overload, insufficient capacity due to patient numbers, collapse of structure-all hands on deck, challenging ethical decisions)

- Feeling distressed/overwhelmed
- May feel unable to cope
- Staff burnout
- Working out of scope of practice



COVID-19 PHASES OF THE MENTAL HEALTH WAVE

TAIL-OFF PHASE / POST COVID (more capacity, minor ethical dilemmas)

- Staff running on empty
- Many with burnout
- Potential retrospective guilt
- Delayed stress response
- Delayed psychological impact

No rest in sight for NHS staff means taking action to support their mental health

By Neil Greenberg | 25 May 2020

- **COVID-19 Fatigue**
- **Returning to work after isolation, losses at work and at home**
- **Financial implications**
- **What now ? New Normal ?**
- **Loss of training, large waiting lists**

I'm an NHS doctor - and I've had enough of people clapping for me
Anonymous

Culture

Calling Healthcare Workers War “Heroes” Sets Them Up to Be Sacrificed

arity and it is not staffed by heroes.
id by successive governments

In using feel-good military narratives, we obscure the fact that our essential workers are unprotected and unnecessarily martyred.

BY TALIA LAVIN

April 15, 2020

Musaub Khan / April 20, 2020

The Problem With Heroizing Health Care Workers Like Me

We don't want glory. We just want our jobs to be protected—in every sense.


Politics

Nurses Say They Don't Want to Be Called Heroes During the Coronavirus Pandemic

"I don't need a compliment; I need safe staffing."

BY HANNA WALLIS

APRIL 28, 2020



“Crisis, however, does not have to be an inhibitor of innovation, but can be an invitation for innovation. Historically speaking, crisis is often followed by a creative resurgence of the human spirit that guides changes in technological and social innovation”

Jessica Carson

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