

UCSF Cope: Manager Tips during COVID-19

Managers across the world struggle with how to adjust to the “new normal” of COVID-19 and the impact on their workforce. As a manager, it is hard to know what their staff needs to feel supported because we are in such uncharted territory. Also, staff might feel hesitant to reach out for help--especially in healthcare where there is a culture of being self-reliant. Studies have shown that staff who feel supported by their manager are more resilient and can get more work done. With this in mind, below is a guide with suggestions that managers can try in their work settings. We hope you find this helpful.

- **Check-ins during Standing**

Meetings: Managers typically hold regular meetings with employees. These meetings are a great opportunity to build staff supports and resilience. The first step is knowing what makes your team anxious. Once you know this, you can focus on these specific areas. To do this, we recommend using standing meetings to do the following (**See Box 1**).

- **Recognizing Stress and Providing Support:**

As a manager, we need to recognize that staff have limits. They are under incredible stress at work and at home. Staff should be encouraged to care for themselves and get good sleep, drink water, and exercise. During weekly meetings, managers should talk about the opportunity to seek more support via the UCSF Cope Program (tiny.ucsf.edu/cope) (e.g., *“Feeling stressed is not a sign of weakness, it is normal in these circumstances. I want to share some resources that might help our team to become stronger.”* If your Department or Division would like a monthly hour-long Wellbeing Town Hall or Resilience small group meeting, the UCSF Cope team can discuss these services with you. You may also think about having individual check-ins with staff whose behavior has changed so you can review these support resources with them

- **Hold informal group meetings:** Several teams are having virtual coffee breaks, lunch meetings, and happy hours. Other teams set up Slack groups. These are important because this is a way to deliver peer support. It is not needed for managers to be at these meetings. In fact, it is better for employees to meet without the managers. Use your best judgment.

- **Gratitude:** Simple and genuine expressions of gratitude toward staff is very important. Leaders should recognize and thank individuals and teams for the work they are doing during regular weekly meetings.

- **Listening Form.** At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our partners at Stanford University’s Department of Psychiatry created an online form. Faculty, trainees and staff could submit their concerns and challenges to their leaders. The Chair’s office had three workers responsible for screening all requests. Requests were sent to the right leader for a response within 24 hours. Anonymous concerns helped identify problems and distribute resources by the leadership team. Notably, they only got about 1-2 emails daily. If

Box 1

Create space to understand the sources of stress

- ❖ Carve out 5-10 minutes in your agenda at the beginning or end of every meeting to understand sources of stressors (both at home and at work).
 - *“This is an incredibly challenging time. Our work is really stressful, and you might be experiencing new stressors at home, too. I want to understand what’s been difficult so we can figure out what resources might help.”*

Assure your staff that you hear them

- ❖ Simply reflecting, *“I hear that you are worried about getting sick. That makes total sense.”*

Work to develop approaches to address concerns

- ❖ Managers should be open and non-defensive to critiques of how they or the University are adding to stress, and try to address these quickly or by the next meeting.

Inform them of available resources

- ❖ *“There are several resources to support wellbeing at UCSF, like UCSF Cope. I have used it and encourage you all to check it out.”*

this is set up in your unit, be mindful that women are often tasked with these types of “office housework” tasks. We suggest sharing this responsibility equally among men and women.

- **Recognize differences among your employees:** Several studies have identified particularly vulnerable populations to psychological impacts from COVID-19. These include front-line providers, women, nurses, people with children at home, and people early in their career.
- **Provide breaks:** Studies have shown that having frequent short breaks can help promote wellbeing. This break-time is especially needed given all of the “zoom fatigue” being reported. Consider reducing hour-long meetings to 50-minutes and encourage your staff to take breaks during the day.
- **Supporting yourself:** Being a leader during the COVID-19 crisis is very stressful. It is important that you get the support you need as well. Remember to help yourself first. Think about using the resources available to you via UCSF Cope. If you are able to maintain your own wellbeing, your team will benefit.
- **Additional Resources:** The UCSF Learning & Organization Development (L&OD) Employee Engagement Program has a great set of [resources](#) for managers to promote wellbeing among their staff.

This document was created by Christina Mangurian, MD, MAS and the UCSF Cope Wellbeing Subgroup.

References:

1. Antares Foundation. Managing Stress in Humanitarian Aid workers: Guidelines for Good Practice. March 2012.
2. Galea S, et al. The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing: The Need for Prevention and Early Intervention. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. Published on-line April 10, 2020.
3. Gustavsson, ME et al. Moral Distress among Disaster Responders: What is it? *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 35(2):212-219, 2020
4. Kisel S, et al. Occurrence, prevention, and management of the psychological effects of emerging virus outbreaks on healthcare workers; rapid review and meta-analysis. *BMJ* 2020; 369:m1642.
5. Lai J et al. Factors Associated with Mental Health Outcomes Among Health Care Workers Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019. *JAMA Network Open*. 2020;3(3): e203976.
6. Rossi R, et al. Mental Health Outcomes Among Frontline and Second-Line Health Care Workers During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic in Italy. *JAMA Network Open*. 2020;3(5):e2010185
7. Shanafelt, T, et al. Understanding and Addressing Sources of Anxiety Among Health Care Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *JAMA*. Published online 4/7/20.