

Saajhi Samajh 15

Healing the Healers: Building Resilience on the Frontline (Supporting the Mental Well-being of Healthcare workers)

Background

Healthcare workers form the backbone of medical care and emergency response systems. From hospitals to community clinics, they operate under immense pressure, making critical decisions that directly affect patient survival and recovery. Their work demands composure, precision, and empathy in the face of human pain, trauma, and loss. Yet, while their focus remains on saving lives, the **emotional and psychological toll** of such high-intensity environments often goes unnoticed.

Constant exposure to suffering, long working hours, and unpredictable schedules place healthcare professionals at a high risk of **chronic stress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Research shows that **nearly 60%** of healthcare workers have sought **psychiatric help**, and **38% report poor sleep quality** that impacts mood and performance. (Khasne RW et al, 2020) Despite this, the **stigma around mental health** continues to prevent many from seeking timely support. Recent studies underline the severity of this challenge:

- **59%** of doctors cite burnout as the primary reason for leaving clinical practice. (Kesarwani V et al. 2020)
- **34%** feel trapped in extended work hours often exceeding 60 hours per week (Stewart H, 2024)
- A **2024 survey** found **51%** of physicians switched careers for better work-life balance and lower stress. (Stewart H, 2024)
- **76%** of healthcare professionals now consider mental health support a key factor when evaluating job opportunities, yet over half report that their workplaces lack formal mental health policies. (Randstad, 2025)

The **COVID-19 pandemic** magnified these pressures, with prolonged frontline duties, infection risks, and the emotional strain of patient loss leading to widespread fatigue and burnout **44.6% of healthcare workers** reported experiencing personal burnout during this period. (Khasne RW et al, 2020) Evidence also shows that healthcare staff who receive **mental health and resilience training** demonstrate improved well-being, confidence, and patient outcomes. (Nguyen E, 2023)

Globally and in India, there is growing recognition that **“healers need healing too.”** Despite mounting evidence of psychological strain, structured interventions to support the mental health of healthcare workers remain limited. In India, **one in four** professionals report feeling emotionally drained and “used up” due to work-related stress. (Kesarwani V et al. 2020) This highlights the **urgent need for systemic, sustained efforts** to prioritize their mental well-being, build resilience, and normalize the culture of seeking psychological support.

Rationale

- **Critical Workforce:** Healthcare workers, including paramedics, technicians, and emergency care assistants, are vital to emergency and pre-hospital care. Their efficiency and composure directly influence patient outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the healthcare system.
- **High Mental Health Risk:** Constant exposure to trauma, long hours, and high-pressure environments places healthcare workers at greater risk of stress, burnout, anxiety, and PTSD, affecting both their well-being and professional performance.

- **Limited Support Systems:** Unlike doctors and nurses, healthcare workers often lack structured wellness or counselling programs. Their psychological needs remain largely unaddressed within existing institutional frameworks.
- **Need for Resilience Building:** Equipping healthcare workers with coping strategies, mental health literacy, and peer-support mechanisms can strengthen their resilience, improve care quality, and enhance retention in the healthcare sector.

Proposed Focus Areas

1. **Coping Mechanisms:** Healthcare professionals working in high-stress, acute-care, and emergency environments face immense psychological pressure. Training in psychological first aid, stress management techniques, and resilience practices can strengthen their ability to cope with trauma and sustain performance.

Question: *How can educational institutions serve as building blocks for teaching coping mechanisms and fostering resilience to help healthcare professionals manage the emotional and psychological toll of high-intensity work environments?*

2. **Breaking Stigma:** The stigma surrounding mental health often prevents healthcare staff from acknowledging stress, seeking help, or discussing challenges openly. Cultural and systemic changes are essential to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive work environment that prioritizes psychological well-being alongside clinical excellence.

Question: *What cultural and systemic reforms can employers and institutions implement to break the stigma around mental health and create a more open, supportive, and inclusive workplace for healthcare professionals?*

Description: Saajhi Samajh

The webinar will be a 90-minute interactive session designed for paramedics, healthcare workers, frontline workers, emergency care assistants and other stakeholders from the healthcare sector, along with employers, to make the workplace more sensitive. This will be a part of the “Saajhi Samajh” (Shared Understanding) series of webinars organized by Tech Mahindra Foundation. It will feature expert speakers who will discuss various aspects of coping mechanisms, awareness, training, and stress management as well as their psychological impacts.

References:

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4. Simbo AI. Transitioning to Non-Clinical Roles: Opportunities and Motivations for Physicians Leaving Traditional Practice [Internet]. Simbo AI
5. Aymes S. Work-life balance for physicians: The what, the why, and the how [Internet]. Medical News Today; 2020 Sept 22
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8. Randstad. Healthcare professionals prioritize mental health support in job hunt and fall behind in tech training, new research shows [Internet]. Randstad; 2025 May 8