

Redeploying Healthcare Workers

Supporting Healthcare Workers Redeploying after Crisis Response

General recommendations for health care workers

It is important to strengthen stress management skills before and during a disaster response. If this was lacking for the current disaster response, after action review should include a plan to address for the future.

Organizational policies and priorities to support redeployment

- Create an atmosphere where responders can be open with supervisors about their experiences, feelings, and concerns.
- Create structured forums for responders to present lessons learned/recommendations for future preparedness activities.
- Give specific advice regarding commonly faced readjustment issues such as sleep, coping with emotions related to disaster response, ways to find support and support others, and managing conflicts.
- Optimize liberal or flexible leave policies for returning employees.

What to expect from the workforce

Returnees may experience:

- **Extreme fatigue** - encourage extra rest for all responders; medically evaluate if fatigue is persistent.
- **Adjustment period** - as they return to the normal pace versus crisis response pace, normalize and validate. Reflect on the different demand characteristics of the situation.
- **Cynicism** –disappointment, loss and blame are common responses and there are always examples of people and organizations at their worst. Help workers regain perspective by focusing on successes and positive outcomes. Ask about lessons learned and experiences endured. Incorporate lessons learned in collaborative, transparent way, when planning for the future.
- **Emotional sensitivity, intense emotions** - expect it, provide support and normalize this reaction as typical and temporary. Help workers cope and contain. Offer extra leave if necessary, and/or stress management learning opportunities. Create safety for those who need additional support, including professional help. Characterize appropriate help seeking as a positive community value.
- **Provide opportunities for sharing experiences** - those with similar roles often feel validated discussing shared experiences. Sharing across roles is important as well and can engender empathy, understanding, and cohesion. Nevertheless, sharing across roles must be strategic and it is vital to ensure that both types of disclosure are given adequate support and space. Be mindful of graphic discussion, which may cause distress for some.
- **Difficulties with colleagues and supervisors** – be aware of the “we” versus “they” between those who responded and those who stayed behind. Appreciate the impact of the crisis on everyone. Identify and discuss important roles played by both sides. Remind staff that everyone is a part of the response effort. If present, address/quell misinformation directed at returnees regarding fears of contagion by providing information from an unbiased, trusted source.

For Leadership

- Be prepared with resources and referrals for those who may require additional help.
- Have a plan for managing counterproductive responses (e.g., degrading help seeking, or criticizing/judging another's role in the crisis response).
- Be sure to apply self-care recommendations to yourself, especially if you are starting to identify with returning staff members' descriptions of stress symptoms, such as sleep problems, stomach ailments, or irritability.

