

# The Need for Resiliency in the Health Care

- Do you want more productive employees?
- Would you like to reduce health care costs?
- Do you want higher morale?
- Would you like to improve patient satisfaction?
- If so, you need a resilient workforce.

**H**ealth care is a stressful profession, and takes its toll at physical, emotional, and mental levels. To effectively care for other people, you must take good care of yourself. This requires the utilization of basic resiliency skills such as developing an attitude of optimism and hope, overcoming the daily effects of stress, and maintaining appropriate levels of fun and enjoyment in life.

In the health care profession, which has always been physically and emotionally demanding, sustaining resiliency has been made increasingly difficult because of continuing staffing shortages, on-going budget cuts, and increases in patient acuity.

Health care employees not only work long hours, but also face the continual challenge of doing more with less. Sicker patients necessitate a heightened vigilance for signs of anything that might go wrong, but this need competes with requirements for more and more documentation. Workers are finding that as abilities for sustained concentration and memory are strained, the risk for errors increases.

In addition, the health care environment itself is one of constant change and adaptation, which often leads to communication problems and an increased potential for staff conflict. Mix in the many demands of daily home life and the result can be an overwhelming risk for on the job problems of stress, burnout, and depression. It is the life enhancing skills of resiliency that reduce this risk.

**T**he economic scope of the problem is outlined by Ravi Tangri in his book *Stress Costs, Stress Cures* where he estimates the expense of stress to US

companies as an astounding \$300 billion a year. This high price is calculated from stress's impact on variables such as absenteeism, turnover, short and long-term disability payments, medical costs for psychosomatic ailments, and workplace accidents.

Depression in the workplace is taking a similar toll with an estimated annual price tag of \$44 billion mainly coming from absenteeism and other associated on-the-job losses of productivity.

Stress and depression affect employee retention by driving workers away, thereby, increasing the costs of recruitment and training.

The efficient delivery of quality health care services requires a resilient workforce. Now, more than ever, the skills of resiliency are needed in the workplace.

**W**hat is resiliency? In physics, it is the ability of a material to quickly return to its original form after being bent, stretched, or twisted.

Psychological resiliency is a similar concept. It is the ability of people to return to normal by bouncing back from the ups and downs of life. Levels of psychological resiliency depend upon three key features.

The first is attitude. Resilient people consistently choose an optimistic outlook on life. An optimistic attitude is one of hopeful expectation for positive results. It is also flexible because a flexibly optimistic viewpoint does not discount the negative events of life, but intentionally and realistically looks for the best outcome in any situation. It is this looking for the best that pulls resilient people through hard times

and puts them back into shape. A positive attitude reduces the potential for stress and depression.

The second element of resiliency is knowing how to manage stress. Life is naturally stressful and resilient people know how to take purposeful action to control it. They avoid whatever stress they can by saying “No” and setting limits, but they also practice unwinding from stress. Such unwinding may be through physical exercise, as with a daily workout at the gym, or it might involve the practice of meditation, tai chi, or yoga. Unwinding from everyday stress can be as simple as taking a slow, mindful walk through the neighborhood. The ability to manage stress makes workers more efficient.

The third characteristic of resilient people is that they enjoy life by making the intentional choice to participate in it. Resilient people accept the fact that on some days you don’t “feel” like going to work, cleaning the house, or attending a party. However, they also know that it is important to do these things whether or not you feel like it.

Each day should provide a sense of accomplishment and joy. This means that it is important to both have fun and to get something done. The accomplishments and joys do not have to be sensational and may be as basic as making the bed and petting your dog. It is primarily the appreciation of such simple joys and accomplishments that keeps life in balance. Resilient people know this so they intentionally engage in the daily practice of enjoyment so as to keep their energy up.

Resilient workers are able to take care of themselves so that they can better take care of others. Resilient employees maintain motivation, control stress, and enjoy what they do.

The increasingly high business costs of stress, depression, and burnout, especially in health care, make it incumbent upon employers to help their workers help themselves because if they do so, it will also help the bottom line. A resilient “bounce back” team not only provides a better service but also knows how to support each other through times of challenge and crisis. To reduce the effects of stress and depression in your workplace (and to improve the bottom line) offer your employees the three key skills of resiliency. Help them learn:

- How to become self-motivating with the daily skill of attitudinal choice.
- How to quickly identify and “undo” the symptoms of stress.
- How to maintain a high energy level through an appreciation for daily accomplishments, and an increased awareness of opportunities for enjoyment.

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