
Healthcare Leaders Discuss Pandemic Role of the Chief Wellness Officer



Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare systems struggled to manage the mental health and wellbeing of their diverse healthcare workforce who often suffered from stress, anxiety, long working hours and other related issues, which can lead to workplace burnout.

The relatively new role of the chief wellness officer (CWO) are tasked with improving the wellbeing of healthcare workers (HCW). Already a significant responsibility prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic, the scope of the CWO's responsibilities — which had focused mainly on clinical providers initially — expanded at some healthcare organisations to include all HCWs, nonclinical faculty, and learners, including workforces as large as more than 30,000 HCWs.

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In a recently published NEJM Catalyst [article](#), nine healthcare leaders discuss the integral role CWOs play in managing crises, and what has been learned over the past months about best practice in addressing workforce wellbeing. This article is a compilation of described activities and challenges of this group of authors, and notably, most healthcare organisations could not employ all initiatives.

5 key activities that CWOs can positively impact operations by:

1. **Playing a critical role in optimising the organisational response to workplace well-being during a crisis. Informing the leadership team about which support services are available and which may require development or augmentation to address the well-being of HCWs. Ensuring bidirectional, clear, and transparent communication between HCWs and leadership.**
2. **Ensuring immediate support, advice, and consultation as needed to address the changing needs of the workforce during a crisis.**
3. **Acting to integrate, augment, amplify, and coordinate all support services and wellness resources of various entities across the organisation.**
4. **Helping to guide and increase the effectiveness of frontline and executive leaders.**
5. **Facilitating the recovery phase of healing and rebuilding with the resolution of the crisis.**

During the pandemic, authors said they relied on resources and infrastructure already in place for their health systems' disaster preparedness for workforce wellbeing. They also increased psychological support at their organisations, including expanded access to virtual peer support, mental health hotlines and individual counselling. Chief wellness officers can play a key role during crises by ensuring workers' well-being remains central to operating plans at their organisation, the authors said. They recommended health systems incorporate attention to the wellbeing of the workforce into emergency management protocols.

Source: [NEJM](#)

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