

Wellbeing of Surgical Staff since the COVID-19 Pandemic

Editor

The COVID-19 pandemic continues its spread, with many countries battling a second wave of cases. Already, surgical services all over the world have reorganized to cope with the pandemic¹⁻³. Despite this, its impact on staff wellbeing has not been as thoroughly assessed. To investigate this, doctors, nurses and administrative staff (AS) from our surgical department self-administered the ProQOL 5⁴ anonymously upon implementation of our pandemic plans in March 2020 and three months later in June 2020. The raw scores were analysed with the independent samples t-test.

Overall, 197 (49 doctors, 138 nurses and 10 AS) out of 273 (72.2%) and 202 (48 doctors, 148 nurses and 6 AS) out of 284 (70.6%) personnel responded to the pre and post surveys respectively. All groups reported low to moderate levels of Burnout, Compassion Satisfaction (CS) and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) at baseline, with no significant difference in all components observed at the three-month mark.

However, both nurses and AS reported significantly higher burnout scores (mean 25.6, $p = 0.036$ and mean 28.3, $p = 0.039$) and STS (mean 25.6, $p < 0.001$ and mean 28.3, $p = 0.017$)

compared to doctors (mean 23.3 and 21.5) at baseline. This was similar after 3 months, where nurses and AS reported higher STS (mean 25.1, $p = 0.027$ and mean 26.5, $p = 0.038$) than doctors (mean 22.6).

Although other studies have reported increased staff burnout and stress rates^{5,6}, our staff wellbeing remained stable. During planning, staff wellbeing was prioritized and we also significantly scaled down our elective load to mobilize manpower and resources for pandemic care. On a larger scale, the comprehensive national strategy flattened the curve and alleviated the frontline workload.

The lower burnout and STS rates among doctors at both time-points could partially be due to our unique model of having teams alternate between inpatient and outpatient duty, which provided respite between hectic weeks. Our results highlight a need to consider the wellbeing of not just frontline but backend support staff as well.

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