

# MENTAL HEALTH PPE

## Texas Nurses COVID-19 Task Force



## PROTECTION FOR NURSES

Just like personal protective equipment keeps nurses physically safe, mental health PPE is strategies and behaviors that protect nurses' *mental health* as they are faced with a public crisis and are called to action to care for our communities.

Texas COVID-19 Mental Health Support Line:  
**833-986-1919**

### Physical activity

There is much that nurses cannot control, like staffing, PPE shortages and patient acuity. But finding a way to be *physically active* can provide immediate mental health benefits and can even be a *safe social activity*. Try to incorporate time to be active, which could even include family play time, chores or exercise.



## MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The pandemic has put new stressors on nurses that can affect them physically, emotionally and mentally. *Watch for these signs* that may indicate you should seek help:

- Emotional responses like anxiety, sadness, guilt, anger or fear
- Sleep disturbances such as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or chronic exhaustion
- Problematic or risky behaviors such as increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Physical symptoms such as rapid heart rate, headaches, gastrointestinal distress or high startle response
- Social changes like increased conflicts with coworkers or family members, withdrawal and isolation, or becoming clingy or needy

### Accessing mental health supports

 **Download TNA's Resource Guide**



**Online, text or phone counseling**



**Apps or websites on mindfulness**



**Videos with calming sounds or guided meditation**



**Employee Assistance Programs**



**Other resources from employer**

If cost is an issue, you may be eligible for free or reduced cost resources through *the Emotional PPE Project*, which has volunteer mental health practitioners available at no cost. Your health insurance plan may also cover mental health services. Speak with your supervisor about other resources your organization may have that are available to you.

# ADVOCATING FOR MENTAL HEALTH PPE

While self-care is important, it is only part of the solution. Just as nurses and others don't have to provide their own masks, gowns and gloves, they shouldn't be expected to provide their own psychological PPE. Nurse leaders must **step up** to take care of their staff.

**“We, the community and health care leaders, must be proactive in preventing trauma and injury — both physical and mental.”**

- Cindy Zolnierek, PhD, RN, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer, Texas Nurses Association

## Power in numbers

Nurses who do not have enough mental health support should make sure their nurse leaders are aware. The more nurses who speak up, the more likely it is that you can create change. Remember: **Nurses have power in numbers!**

- Meet with your supervisor or manager to discuss resources from your organization that you can take advantage of.
- Do not feel pressured to pick up extra shifts if you do not have the mental energy; you are not obligated to work extra. (Learn more about **mandatory overtime** during emergency declarations.)
- Reach out to your shared governance representative or attend a shared governance meeting to escalate issues of mental health with your site leadership.



**SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES**



**CONNECT PEERS TO RESOURCES**

## Supporting colleagues

Let your staff and peers know that they aren't alone. Speak transparently about your experiences. Share your feelings with your staff, other nurse leaders and your supervisors. Also, keep an eye out for signs of mental health stress as listed on page 1. Take some time to talk to your coworkers, and help them find resources if they need them.

Among nurses who responded to an **American Nurses Association survey**:

**72%** felt exhausted in the past 14 days.

**64%** felt overwhelmed.

**66%** put their patients' well being ahead of their own.

## STRATEGIES FOR ADVOCACY

### Meet your Chief Nursing Officer.

- Share your experiences and observations of the mental health stressors in your work environment.
- Ask that mental health resources be made available for you and your colleagues.

### Participate on committees in your workplace,

such as shared leadership, staffing and peer review.

- Participate in making decisions that can alleviate stressors for nurses.
- Advocate for education, training, resources or other supports to improve nurse well being.

### Join a professional nursing organization,

such as Texas Nurses Association.

- Learn about and get access to free resources such as the **Deprexis app** or **nurse suicide prevention toolkit**.
- Connect with and learn from nurses outside your workplace. Share expertise, experiences, passions and frustrations.