

AHA Hospitals in Action: Supporting Care Teams

Inspiring Stories and Solutions from the Field

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals and health systems continue doing everything they can to care for their patients and communities, and that extends to all



health care workers on the front lines: physicians, nurses, food services, environmental services, administrative teams, emergency medical services and support teams. Even in normal circumstances, working in health care can be challenging, stressful and tiring; the ongoing pandemic has made the work especially exhausting, both physically and mentally.

Hospitals and health systems are sharing through the [AHA Living Learning Network \(LLN\)](#)¹, [AHA Behavioral Health Services](#) and the [AHA LISTSERVs](#) their stories from the field on how they are supporting the well-being of their health care workers. The AHA LLN is a virtual community to discuss, ideate and reform health care in response to COVID-19 with other leaders across the field. AHA LLN participants have access to a curated network of respected subject matter experts and distinguished colleagues to participate in real-world discussions, expand perspectives and problem-solve together. AHA's Behavioral Health Services provides resources and education for behavioral health care leaders, links

members with shared interests and, through its members, helps shape AHA's behavioral health policy and advocacy activities.

Collated here are some of the ideas shared that you could use in your own hospital or health system. Additional suggestions for addressing clinician resilience are available in the AHA Physician Alliance [Well-being Playbook](#).

Hospitals in Action: Supporting Well-being

- **AllianceHealth Ponca City** in Oklahoma has supported its health care teams by providing free breakfasts, pre-made casseroles available at cost, a certified emotional support dog that rounds to all departments and chair massages. Hospital administration personally placed "A healthcare HERO lives here" signs in the yards of health care professionals and asked local schools to write thank-you cards.
- **Aspen Valley Hospital** in Colorado uses several strategies to show appreciation for health care professionals and the work they do. This includes creating Zen rooms/time-out rooms at the hospital, providing light therapy, offering 15-minute Zoom yoga



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or meditation/mindfulness sessions a few times each week, hosting a winter festival and giving gift baskets. Zen/time-out rooms are dedicated spaces for health care professionals to use one at a time that are free of interruptions. These rooms provide nourishing moments of pause in the day to recharge and have a sensory detox, as well as opportunities to de-stress through meditation, yoga and power naps.

- **Cody Regional Health** in Wyoming has encouraged its health care workers to take care of themselves during the pandemic by providing a specified wellness area. The health system’s Cedar Mountain Center, part of West Park Hospital and next to Yellowstone National Park, was converted into a wellness area for employees to take needed breaks. Located on the third floor, the wellness area provides a calming place to recover the mind, body and soul. The new space, staffed 24/7, includes a meditation room, eight bedrooms with private bathrooms, laundry and shower facilities, on-site access to licensed therapists for emotional support, puzzles and games, and an exercise area to meet employees’ needs.
- **Hackensack Meridian Health** in New Jersey called on its Behavioral Health Team and Integrative Health and Medicine Team to develop a number of virtual and in-person services for health care professionals and hospital personnel. These services, coordinated under the leadership of HMM’s chief wellness officer, include offering educational classes and training on stress management, relaxation and mindfulness, and virtual yoga. The health network also compiled and continues to expand a list of internal and external resources for team members to access, ranging from self-help to peer-to-peer support; chat and

text lines; crisis lines and access to the Employee Assistance Program and formal behavioral health services along a full continuum of care options. In addition, during the holiday season, health care professionals and their families were able to listen to virtual bedtime stories read by local celebrities, and could participate in “Coping with COVID” groups. These programs, services and resources are available to all HMM team members, as the impact of providing care through the COVID-19 pandemic touches every level of the hospital staff. There are ongoing communications to make team members aware of the services and programs, including electronic communications, printed brochures and posters in the facilities, and leadership champions throughout the organization. The health system CEO sent a letter to team member families, thanking them for their support and sacrifice, making it possible for their front-line loved ones to be there for patients and each other through this crisis.

- **Lenox Hill Hospital** in New York City, part of Northwell Health, started convening “hope huddles” with emergency room and intensive care unit nurses to provide optimism, closure and camaraderie while caring for very ill patients. Now these huddles occur on every floor across the hospital, in addition to their regular huddles. During hope huddles, conducted at the beginning of shift changes, health care teams share news of patients recovering and other inspiring, or even humorous, stories. The hospital has posted a [YouTube video](#) that highlights the first weeks of its hope huddles.
- **Liberty Hospital** in Missouri uses a Lavender Cart to support its teams. The cart can be activated through





a switchboard system 24/7 as a “code lavender alert” by any unit or department in the hospital that feels they need some extra spiritual, emotional or even “chocolate” support. The cart carries snacks, lavender and other scented lotions, electric candles, morale-boosting message cards and shoulder massagers. The hospital also has a Lavender Team that spends time with health care workers, talking and listening to provide support. The idea for the Lavender Cart was adapted from Cleveland Clinic.

- **Rogers Behavioral Health** in Wisconsin, launched the [Compassion Resilience Toolkit](#) with discussion materials, blogs and video clips customized for health care teams, as well as school leadership teams, parents and caregivers. Compassion resilience “is the ability to maintain physical, emotional and mental well-being while responding compassionately to people who are suffering.” The toolkit includes information, activities and resources for understanding, recognizing and minimizing the experience of compassion fatigue and increasing compassion resilience skills from an individual and organizational perspective — particularly important during the pandemic. Rogers Behavioral Health produced the toolkits in collaboration with its partners at Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination (WISE). It recently added a Compassion in Action: COVID-19 series featuring videos and blogs on compassion resilience topics such as boundaries to support team culture, locus of control, mindfulness, stress and gratitude related to challenges of the pandemic. By viewing the short videos, employees can earn required education credits.
- **Sanford Health** in South Dakota partnered with the University of North Dakota to launch the initial phase

of Behavioral Health Bridge, a website offering a variety of mental health resources to health system professionals, patients and families. The website currently features several sections, or modules, with videos, illustrations and important information on behavioral health and the impact of COVID-19; coping with stress, worry, grief and loss; self-care and caring for loved ones; and well-being and behavioral health for health care providers. Each section discusses warning signs and how individuals can support themselves or others who may be displaying signs and symptoms.

- **TriStar Hendersonville Medical Center** in Tennessee and **Springhill Medical Center** in Alabama have counseling support for their teams. TriStar Hendersonville has an Employee Assistance Program with on-site counselors to support health care professionals with free counseling. Springhill Medical Center has engaged a psychiatrist to hold group meetings and offers one-on-one counseling with health care professionals caring for COVID-19 patients.
- **UofL Health — Peace Hospital** in Kentucky uses the Zoom platform to provide coping techniques to health care professionals through the Trauma Tapping Technique (TTT), a proven self-help technique for relaxing emotional stress, and Havening, an alternative therapy technique that incorporates distraction, touch and eye movements to reduce anxiety and distress associated with negative memories. For TTT, a licensed mental health therapist demonstrates tapping gently on points of the body to connect with a calming sensation in the body and brain. For Havening, the therapist illustrates how to apply gentle touch to arms, hands and/or face (with clean hands) to connect with a process that is hardwired into the brain and body for





calming. These trainings are offered at various times, three days per week. Recently, the hospital set up an emotional support line staffed with mental health therapists around the clock for the entire UofL Health System — over 10,000 employees — and began weekly Zoom meditation and mindfulness meetings. The hospital also set up a relaxation room with a diffuser, sound machine, rocking chairs and bean bag chairs for health care workers to use when they need a break.

- **Wayne Memorial Hospital** in North Carolina has supported its health care teams through community involvement. The community has been very supportive, and people still go to the hospital parking lot every morning and evening to pray for the hospital as a whole. Community members also bring meals and care packages for health care workers. The hospital is planning to provide opportunities for health care professionals to have group painting lessons, with the money from the “painting parties” going to a local charity in the community. The paint parties serve a dual purpose, giving health care professionals an escape from their routine and, at the same time, allow them to feel like a part of the community outside of work.

Additional Resources

- [AHA Physician Alliance: Physician Well-Being Playbook 2.0](#)
- [AHA Physician Alliance Well-Being Playbook](#)
- [AHA Caring for our Health Care Heroes during COVID-19](#)
- [AHA: COVID-19 Stress and Coping Resources](#)
- [AHA American Society for Health Care Human Resources Administration \(ASHHRA\) Strategies to Cultivate Joy in the Workplace](#)
- [Education Development Center Suicide Prevention Resource](#)
- [National Academy of Medicine: Clinician Well-Being Knowledge Hub](#)
- [National Center for PTSD: Managing Healthcare Workers' Stress Associated with the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak](#)
- [Suicide Resource Prevention Center: Resources to Support Mental Health and Coping with the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [University of California San Francisco: Useful Wellness and Mental Health Apps](#)