

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Through the Eyes of Filipino Healthcare Workers

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted healthcare workers with a burden of not just taking care of patients but also of co-workers that have contracted the disease as a hazard of their occupation. The emotional toll that it takes on the healthcare providers will continue long after the COVID-19 pandemic and that burden will be carried in their practice. This pandemic shows that the heart of the Filipino healthcare worker will not falter and as long there is someone in need, they will be there.

Keyword: COVID-19; Healthcare worker; Psychological impact

About the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Filipino healthcare workers with a burden of not just taking care of patients but also of co-workers that have contracted the disease as a hazard of their occupation. The Philippines has tallied a total of 15,662 healthcare workers that have been infected with COVID-19 with 82 of them have died. Handling patients who are strangers, compared to a patient who you work with is entirely different [1]. There is a need to address the stress of taking care of co-workers and sometimes their death due to COVID-19.

This is a correspondence to an article published in the Journal of Public Health in which the author discussed 'the difficulties associated with loss, grief and healing in the COVID-19 pandemic' [2].

Death and dying of healthcare workers as they do their occupation is magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic wherein death is becoming the norm with the increase of cases and lack of equipment and manpower. But in cases where a doctor or nurse whom are co-workers of the staff are the ones needing healthcare, the situation becomes entirely different because of the emotional connection they have with the patient. The COVID-19 pandemic has given Filipino healthcare workers an unprecedented burden to bear such as having to deal with their co-workers dying and dealing with their death later on.

Lauren Yost emphasized that a death of a colleague should never be underestimated as it brings about certain impacts in the agency [3-6]. A loss of a colleague may lead to a variety of result one of which is the psychological impact to the grieving coworkers. Despite the given bereavement leaves, grief stretches beyond the five days (in some institutions) given to grieve; this may give a heavier psychological burden in the event a colleague dies. There needs to be an established sensitivity towards grieving staff with the fact that operations in the institution must still be functional despite the untimely loss of a colleague. Therefore, appropriate interventions are a necessity to facilitate therapeutic grief [3].

The American Psychological Association (APA) in 2013 published an article on coping with the death of a coworker [4]. Inability to focus, difficulty getting back on track, insomnia, depression, and other chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure are some of the physical and emotional impact of grief. Verbalization of thoughts and accessing available assistance programs of the institution are some of the recommendations of APA to process grief naturally. This may however be difficult with the pandemic on going. The restrictions to grieving family members are imposed to colleagues as well. In this regard, a recent correspondence may seem significant where anticipatory grieving and loss appear effective and promotes therapeutic grief [5,6].

Conclusion

The fear of seeing a co-worker on a stretcher having difficulty breathing needing emergency care is a reality. The emotional toll that it takes on the healthcare providers will continue long after the COVID-19 pandemic and that burden will be carried in their practice. This is something that only they are experiencing and will either break them or make them stronger. Based on history, Filipino healthcare workers have been on the front line and have surpassed numerous trials. This pandemic shows that the heart of the Filipino healthcare worker will not falter and as long there is someone in need, they will be there.

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