



ASSOCIATION DES
MÉDECINS PSYCHIATRES
DU QUÉBEC



FÉDÉRATION DES MÉDECINS
OMNIPRATICIENS DU QUÉBEC



PROGRAMME
D'AIDE
AUX MÉDECINS
DU QUÉBEC



UNIVERSITÉ
LAVAL

Taking care of our caregivers to better care for the population

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, several authorities have expressed concern about the psychological health of caregivers. At the heart of care teams, physicians have seen the level of distress rise. In solidarity, during this Mental Health Week, we feel it is important to share our thoughts and to promote a new balance between the health of caregivers and that of the population.

The wear and tear of time

Over the course of the three waves of the pandemic, anxiety, fatigue and distress have been reported among nurses, attendants, respiratory therapists, social workers, physicians, managers and all health care professionals. This was exacerbated by fear of contamination, rapid migration to teleconsultation, staff shortages, absenteeism and burnout, combined with the impact of all these upheavals on the personal level. What's more, the pandemic has occurred in a health care system that was already under stress. Many who were navigating the storm relatively well at the outset are now experiencing the aftermath. The accumulation of pandemic fatigue is causing psychological distress. By ignoring the impact of the systemic effects on individuals, the burden of maintaining their psychological balance has been unwittingly placed on them.

Loss of ideals

Thus, we are concerned that certain decisions, taken in good faith in an emergency context, such as offloading, shifting the workforce, overloading tasks, or cancelling vacations, are conducive to the professional exhaustion of the care teams we work with. The situation can lead to a loss of meaning in the work, a departure from the ideals of working in health, a lack of individual control and a feeling of not being heard. There is also a denial of the need for resourcing, emotional overload and guilt about taking time off.

Reversing the trend

To ensure that professional practice remains a source of fulfillment for all our caregivers and that they are protected from burnout:

- More than ever, let's foster a culture of recognition in workplaces;
- Despite the challenges of resource availability, let's be flexible, let's facilitate work-family balance and let's allow ourselves to innovate in the way we organize work;
- Let's practice peer-to-peer assistance and support among colleagues, regardless of their professional background;

- Encourage and promote the right to disconnect, rest and protected vacation time.

As we finally see hope for a gradual return to normal life, it is imperative that we collectively realize the importance of quickly restoring personal and professional balance so that distress and anxiety do not get the better of our caregivers, otherwise a new crisis will hit us hard and its scope, duration and effects could well be as, if not more, devastating.

The measures announced by Minister Lionel Carmant are a step in the right direction. They will address the need to support those in great distress by building on the principle of peer support. Organizational measures will also be essential to ensure that prevention has a lasting effect.

Let's take this opportunity to salute all of Quebec's caregivers and thank them for putting their expertise, talent and dedication to the common good, and let's not lose sight of the fact that it is by taking care of our caregivers first that we will be able to continue to take care of the population.

Claire Gamache, M.D. FRCPC
Association of Psychiatric Physicians of
Quebec

Mauril Gaudreault, M.D.
Collège des médecins du Québec

Claude Guimond, M.D.
Federation of General Practitioners of Quebec

Karine Igartua, M.D., C.M., FRCPC
Federation of Medical Specialists of Quebec

André Luyet, M.D., FRCPC, MBA
Collège des médecins du Québec

Anne Magnan, M.D.
Quebec Physician Assistance Program

Isabelle Noiseux, M.D.
Federation of General Practitioners of
Quebec

Jessica Ruel-Laliberté, M.D., M. Sc.
Fédération des médecins résidents du
Québec

Michel Vézina, M.D., MPH, FRCPC
Laval University