

Pandemic's impact on the mental health of frontline workers - MTS president quoted

'This has changed everybody's lives': The pandemic's impact on the mental health of frontline workers

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Health-care workers say the pandemic is taking a negative toll on their mental health. (CTV News file photo)

WINNIPEG -- As the health-care system continues to cope with COVID-19, essential health-care workers are feeling the mental burn.

“The system feels like it’s under a lot of pressure, and it is, and we feel that too,” said Tanya Zubert, counsellor and counselling services team leader with the Women’s Health Clinic, a free mental health resource in Winnipeg.

Zubert says even mental health professionals like herself, who are meant to help others with mental health issues, are facing pandemic fatigue.

That’s partly because the pandemic doesn’t allow for in-person counselling sessions.

“What we normally have to offer is just at a reduced level,” said Zubert. “That’s what it feels like on our end.”

Among other health-care workers, a major mental stressor is simply being stretched too thin.

“There’s also been the matter of redeployment,” said Zubert, in which health-care workers are being sent to sites they are not familiar with to help with staffing-related issues.

“I’ve seen that as quite a bit of a stress as people are going into unfamiliar environments.”

Addressing the mental health issues facing health-care professionals and other essential workers isn’t only a problem for the present.

The mental health impacts of the pandemic may be felt for years to come.

“Psychological trauma is a very real concern,” said Dr. Ann Collins, president of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). “Some may experience PTSD.”

To mark the anniversary of the first COVID-19 patient in Canada, the CMA is calling on the federal government to provide a “clear and focused plan” for the months to come.

Part of that should include commitments for more mental health resources for health-care professionals and anyone dealing with the public amid the pandemic, such as teachers, who are likely experiencing similar mental stressors, Collins said.

“This has changed everybody’s lives and the impact and the effect of that will likely be felt very long after this pandemic has ended,” she said.

For Manitoba teachers, the blended learning model is a major source of mental stress, says James Bedford, president of the Manitoba Teachers’ Society.

It is partly because the learning model is so new, says Bedford, and educators are still learning to adapt to the change after an already disruptive academic year.

“It’s the unrelenting burden that they’re carrying throughout the year,” said Bedford. “Nothing is changing to make their lives easier.”

“The changes that are taking place are often making it more and more difficult.”

Bedford notes that a free counselling service offered by the Manitoba Teachers’ Society has recently seen a surge in appointments, as have requests for sick days.

Direct link to video: <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2126230>