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Covid-19: Drop the hero narrative and support doctors' mental health, says charity

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The mental health charity Mind has launched guidance for NHS leaders on creating workplace cultures where mental health and wellbeing are prioritised and talked about openly.

The guidance, which was funded by the BMA, aims to help leaders deal with the stigma related to mental health problems among healthcare workers.¹

It said that although stigma was not a new barrier to NHS staff being able to access mental health support, it had been compounded during the pandemic by the “ongoing hero narrative.”

The guidance said, “The hero narrative, which was intended to communicate the value with which we hold health care professionals, may have unintentionally added to the pressure individuals have felt to rise to the covid-19 challenge, continually going above and beyond their duty of care, putting their mental health at risk.”

The guidance provides support for leaders to talk to staff about mental health issues, including suicide.

Andrew Molodynski, mental health policy lead at the British Medical Association, said, “Improving long term mental health and wellbeing of NHS staff by making important systemic changes to organisational culture and ensuring support is more readily available is crucial to the very survival of the NHS.”

In addition to the guidance, Mind has collaborated with the charities Samaritans, Shout 85258, and Hospice UK to launch Our Frontline,² a support platform that aims to raise awareness of the pandemic's effects on the mental health of NHS staff.

The four charities are working together to provide one to one emotional support by text or phone call that is available UK-wide, around the clock, and for free. It is also providing online mental health and bereavement resources for key workers.

Ben Phillips, head of service programmes at Samaritans, said, “We hope this guide will help NHS leaders and managers to tackle the stigma that can prevent their workforce from getting the mental health support they need, so our NHS staff will feel able to reach out for help if they are struggling.”

1 Mental Health at Work. Supporting the mental health of NHS staff. <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/resource/supporting-the-mental-health-of-nhs-staff>.

2 Mental Health at Work. Our frontline. <https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline>.

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