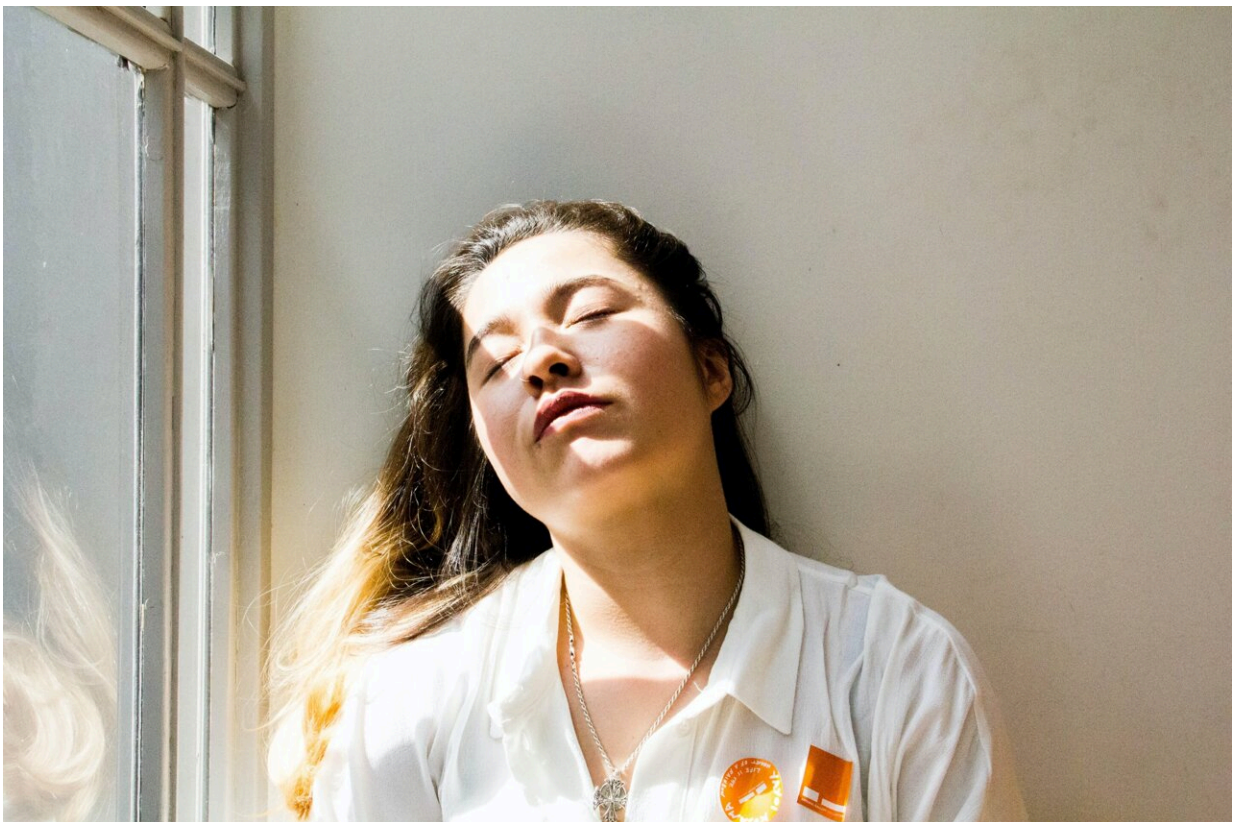


Good workplace support, leadership training can improve mental health, reduce burnout in health care professionals

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Among health care professionals, the feeling of being supported in the workplace can protect them against adverse mental health and burnout,

according to a new study published in *CMAJ Open* by researchers at Queen Mary University of London and medical staff at various hospitals across the UK.

The CoPE-HCP study was designed, during the early part of COVID-19 pandemic, when there was great concern for the [mental health](#) of health care professionals with no scientifically-proven mitigating strategies to reduce that impact. This new longitudinal study found that feeling unsupported at work was associated with an increased risk of depression, [anxiety](#), insomnia, burnout, and low mental well-being, compared to those who felt supported. Interestingly, when these people were followed up, those with improved feelings of workplace support were also shown to have improvements in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and mental well-being over time.

The study involved two online surveys assessing the rates of depression, anxiety, insomnia, burnout, and low mental well-being. In both surveys, it was concerning that 22% of health care professionals felt unsupported in the workplace, which rose to one in four (25%) HCPs feeling this just a few months later. Compared to those who felt unsupported, those who felt supported had a decreased risk of depression (58% reduction and 56% reduction at baseline and follow-up, respectively), anxiety (58% reduction and 39% reduction), insomnia (42% reduction and 54% reduction), emotional exhaustion (65% reduction and 55% reduction), and a threefold increased risk of good mental well-being. Furthermore, improved perceptions of workplace support were associated with reduced depression and anxiety symptoms, and increased mental well-being symptoms over the four month period.

The survey also allowed participants to state what types of support they felt were effective or desired. Five overarching themes were generated relating to 1) concern or recognition regarding welfare, 2) information, 3) tangible qualities of the workplace, 4) leadership, and 5) [peer support](#).

Dr. Ajay Gupta, senior author, chief investigator and Clinical Reader at Queen Mary and Honorary Consultant in Clinical Pharmacology and Cardiovascular Medicine, said, "This important study not only demonstrates the consistent association between workplace support and mental health and burnout in health care professionals, but for the first time it shows that the feeling of being supported significantly protects them against developing [mental health problems](#), such as depression and anxiety. We have furthermore demonstrated what constitutes effective workplace support—simple things such as increased visibility of senior leaders and approachability can do wonders, aside from other measures. These findings will be able to inform significant changes in the workplace guidance targeted at improving mental well-being in health care professionals."

The study is among the first to evaluate the relationship between changes in feeling supported at work and changes in mental health and burnout over time in health care professionals, and identifies the specific [workplace](#) aspects valuable to protecting their mental health during pandemics.

Many health care professionals in the study desired managers who listened and left staff feeling understood, and they valued consistent clear and transparent information sent on a timely manner. Additionally, adequate staffing was highly important, and qualities such as visible and approachable leadership, and camaraderie and solidarity amongst peers were also valuable.

More information: The relationship between the level of (and changes in) perceived workplace support and mental health, wellbeing and burnout in healthcare professionals (HCP) during the COVID-19 pandemic: insight and mitigating strategies from the CoPE-HCP cohort study *CMAJ Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.9778/cmajo.20220191](https://doi.org/10.9778/cmajo.20220191)

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