 **Doctor health & Well-being during COVID-19**

**SAFEMED Makes YOU STRONGER NOT SOFTER**

As a healthcare provider during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know you are working hard to deliver exceptional care, and the stresses and demands you face may impact your energy & well-being. Here are some strategies to help you do your best when it matters most and help you cope well under pressure. It is very important that your well-being and energy is sustained especially during this testing time. The SAFEMED Take five strategy will help you be aware of your needs and connect with resources and strategies to help.

**How might COVID-19 Impact doctor health and well -being?**

There are numerous ways that the COVID-19 pandemic could impact your wellbeing. Some common experiences might be:

•Fear of contagion/spreading illness and concerns about the health and wellbeing of ourselves, our family, and loved ones.

•Uncertainty, overwhelm, and anxiety with the rapidly evolving public health data, changing policies and procedures, and 24/7 news cycle.

•Pressure to work longer and harder, perhaps without the usual sense of effectiveness.

•Stigma or distrust from community, co-workers, friends, and family as they may fear the consequences of being in contact with a healthcare professional during the pandemic.

•Isolation from family, friends, co-workers, and community support systems.

•Significant disruption in our usual routine and reduction in our enjoyable and recreational activities.

•Conflicting demands between work and family responsibilities.

•Ethical concerns about resource availability and equitable distribution of healthcare.

•Denying our basic needs such as need for breaks, sleep, and recovery time or feeling guilty if we are taking time off or attending to our personal needs.

**How do I know if myself or a colleague might need support?**

 It is normal to feel some increased stress as we respond to numerous challenges and demands of the pandemic. This increased stress can actually help us to focus and attend to the very important things we need to do to remain safe at work and home. Doctors and their colleagues might need more support, if they are experiencing any of the following reactions or are not behaving like themselves:

•physical reactions: Fatigue, rapid heart rate, muscle tension, headaches, GI dis comfort or distress, nausea, insomnia, changes in appetite and weight

•emotional reactions: anxiety or fear, irritability, anger, stress reactivity, feeling helpless or hopelessness, depression, anxiety, numbness, detachment, despair

•mental reactions: disorientation/confusion, difficulty with problem solving or decision making, imagining only the worst-case scenarios, flashbacks/nightmares

•behavioral reactions: risk taking, hostility, blaming, reduced ability to cooperate, conflicts with peers or family, withdrawal

What personal strategies are there for managing my stress and restoring and maintaining my wellbeing?

Doctors and healthcare professionals are often so passionate about and focused on the care of others that we may not prioritise our own needs. Yet, our ability to continue to care for others depends on our own self-care, which allows us to sustain our health, energy, and efforts over the long-term. None of these strategies alone will undo the worry and stress we have about COVID-19, but in trying out and developing a strong routine of self-care, we can restore or maintain our well-being during this challenging time, when we need it most.

The SAFEMED ***Take five*** strategy will help you be aware of your needs and connect with resources and strategies to help.

Think about how you can support and maintain health and well-being in all five systems.

**Body health** is the most important foundation for overall health & wellbeing and for keeping stress regulated and manageable. Keep healthy using exercise and good nutritional routines. There may not be time for formal exercise but you can turn walking around the hospital into a good workout as you go. Keep hydrated and Try to ensure that you get to rest & sleep. Sleep is essential to health.

**Mental health** is another important resource, if your body is well cared for, it will be easier to keep your mind calm, clear and coping. Watch your thoughts – the way you think really does affect the way you feel. We have approximately 60,000 thoughts each day – stand guard at the door of your mind and discipline the way you think. Use Healthy Thinking (Step 2 SAFEMED)

**Behavioural Health** develop routines and rituals that you run by each day, it helps to have a list of tasks that you wish to complete each day. Decide on 3-5 priorities (no more) that you endeavour to complete each day. Other things that will help are ….

**CONTEXT**

### Create and follow a daily routine……KISS Keep it Simple and Structured

Maintaining a daily routine can help you preserve a sense of order and purpose in your life despite the unfamiliarity of the crisis situation. Spend what time you do get on things that make your heart sing NOW.

Awareness: Check-In with Yourself: We all experience stress differently. Take a moment before and after each shift to check-In with yourself to assess your feelings/thoughts. Knowing and accepting how we are doing will help us meet our needs. Have your own personal mantra that helps you get through the day.

Attention: Pay attention to the present moment. One step at a time, one task at a time, multitasking is a bit of a myth – you can do lots of things in parallel but it is important to pay full attention to each task as you go.

Pace Yourself: This pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint. Stress might be activating and give us the urge to go faster and work harder. Working smarter not harder will support your effort best at this time. Take mini-breaks and be cautious of the tendency to over-work, push yourself, or neglect your basic needs to eat, hydrate or just pause from time to time.

 Breathe and Be Present: Take a slow deep breath, bring your attention to the present moment. Future concerns and "what If" questions can take us out of the present moment. Practice deep breathing or mindfulness while washing your hands, brushing teeth, during your commute, or before entering a patient room or team meeting to stay present, focused, and centered.

Schedule Worry Time: If you are finding it hard to focus while worried, schedule a short time (3-5 mins) to write down all your worries or concerns on a post-it, journal, or note on your phone. It can help give you the power of pause to make the worries seem more manageable and allow you to "park" unwanted worry thoughts until your scheduled worry time.

Get Clarity about what You Can and cannot Control: Defining what we can control helps us make plans and have direction when feeling high pressure or overwhelmed. Write down a list of things you can and can't control to focus your efforts and actions on the things you can control.

Focus on Success and Strengths: You have strengths that have helped you overcome challenges in the past. Amidst all the challenges and stress, remind yourself of what strengths and skills you bring to this challenge. Every 24hours write a quick list of what is going well and what you are grateful for. Write down 3 Good things…. Bring them to mind and know they will help you get through the challenges you face today and each day.

Stay Connected: It is likely that shifts will be organised as 12 hours on 12 hours off. Have a quick ritual before you start and just as you finish each and every shift. Rituals help us slow down and feel we have some control. It is a good idea to make contact (even just a quick hello message to loved ones each time if you can). Reach out to family, friends, and colleagues for support. Call or use video chat with individuals or groups to meet your social needs. Connect over your shared interests, jokes, entertainment, or other healthy distractions to avoid discussing only the news.

