Survey of staff experiences during COVID19 pandemic

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Purpose: This survey investigated the potential impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on possible stigma associated with being a healthcare worker (HCW). This study aligns with similar work conducted during earlier outbreaks of infectious disease. It provides insight into the scope of this potential problem and describes how HCWs perceive community views and the potential influence on provision of patient care.

Methods: A paper-based survey with 33 questions was conducted within Metro North Mental Health and the Medical and Surgical wards of the RBWH. Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to explore the dimensionality of the HCW stigma scale from the staff survey. Principal axis factoring was used for extraction with Promax rotation accounting for correlation among factors.

Results: A total of 554 staff (67% nursing, 7% medical, 15% Allied Health) completed the survey between June and July 2020. The Exploratory Factor Analysis showed that 5 factors explained 55% of the variance and represents factors of (i) anxiety, (ii) fear, (iii) safety, (iv) workplace relations and (v) confidence in clinical practice. HCWs reported (69%) that their families believe they have a high risk of getting COVID-19. In addition, 53% of HCWs families were worried they might get infected. This anxiety has translated into a degree of fear with 26% of staff believing that people are avoiding them because of their job. Whilst staff believe (80%) that the protective measures at work are generally effective, half (50%) are anxious that other professional groups have been wearing different levels of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and only 55% feel safe caring for patients with COVID-19. Staff also experienced some changes to their activities and social connections but continued their usual exercise routines and their normal levels of sleep and rest.

Conclusion: The results of this study contribute to knowledge of how healthcare workers perceive community views. Although staff may feel well supported at work there may be a conflicting stigma originating from their social interactions beyond the workplace.