

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS,

MAKE TIME TO

TAKE CARE OF YOUR OF

YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH



Working in healthcare is stressful and challenging. Healthcare providers who care for patients with progressive diseases — like those with neuromuscular disease — are under an incredible amount of pressure as they work every day to improve their patients' quality of life and find new treatments and cures.

Despite receiving the best possible care, patients with neuromuscular disease often continue to get worse. To combat feeling depressed and sad about this reality, Ginna Gonzalez, APRN, DNP, an advanced practice nurse who specializes in neuromuscular medicine at the University of Miami Health System in Miami, Florida, recommends focusing on the good you are doing for patients. "You need to learn how to put up a mental wall to protect yourself from the sadness. Focus on the fact that you're helping them by improving their quality of life or helping them die with dignity," she says.

Gonzalez says professional burnout is a major concern, especially with the added stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. To maintain good mental health, she recommends establishing a healthy work/life balance. "It's important to separate your work and your family life," she says. "You don't want to be dwelling on your patients when you're with your family."

Along these same lines, it's important for healthcare workers to take time outside of their jobs to recharge and practice self-care (see 5 tips for self-care). But if feelings of depression, stress, and anxiety are present the majority of the time, seeking professional help is the next step.

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"If I see someone is under a lot of stress and making errors on the job or not responding to patient phone calls, that's a red flag, and I recommend that they talk to the psychologist on our team," Gonzalez says. "We want to keep stress in check to avoid escalation to other mental or physical problems like hypertension or substance abuse, which can be common in healthcare providers."

5 tips for self-care

- 1. Take a break.** If you're having trouble coping with a situation, try to get out of the stressful environment for a bit, even if it's just a short walk. You'll probably find that you can come back with improved energy and focus.
- 2. Just breathe.** Mindful breathing can help calm the mind and improve concentration. Try taking a few slow, deep breaths before seeing each patient or during particularly stressful situations.
- 3. Take care of your body.** Stress doesn't just affect your mind — it also has an impact on your physical being. Making healthy choices, like eating well-balanced meals and exercising regularly, can improve your mental health. Walking, hiking, running, swimming, biking, yoga, Pilates, and weightlifting are all good ways to get your body moving.
- 4. Spend time doing activities you enjoy.** Whether it's hanging out with family and friends, watching a movie or TV show, playing a game, listening to music, or reading a book, taking the time to do something you enjoy can help you recharge after a stressful day or week at work.
- 5. Set goals, priorities, and boundaries.** If you feel like you have a lot on your plate, you don't need to accomplish everything all at once. Decide what needs to be done now and what can wait until later. It's also OK to say "no" to requests or invitations to ensure you are able to devote high-quality time to the commitments you've prioritized.

Commit to self-care

Many things are out of your control, especially during an unusual time like the COVID-19 pandemic. It helps to identify and accept those things that you cannot control, while focusing your energy on the things you can, including your personal self-care practices.

Taking care of yourself not only allows you to continue to deliver high-quality care to your patients, but it helps you feel more satisfaction with your work and may make you less likely to experience burnout.