STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS FOR JOB STRESS

Mrs. D. Thulasimani
Professor, Sakthii College of Nursing, Oddanchatram, Tamilnadu, India.

ABSTRACT
Stress can be external and related to the environment, but may also be caused by internal perceptions that cause an individual to experience anxiety or other negative emotions surrounding a situation, such as pressure, discomfort, etc., which are deemed stressful. Occupational stress is the harmful emotional and physical reactions resulting from interactions between the worker and her/his work environment where the demands of the job exceed the worker’s capabilities and resources. There is a large and growing body of research identifying the measurable effects of mindfulness on the body and brain, and it is catching on in professional settings including education, sports, business and even the military.

Key Words: Stress management, job stress, physical reactions.

ABOUT AUTHOR:

Author Mrs. D. Thulasimani is Professor in Sakthii College of Nursing, Oddanchatram, Tamilnadu, India. She is active researcher and has attended various Seminars and conferences.
INTRODUCTION

“Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of mental illness”
— Richard Carlson

STRESS
In the medical or biological context, stress is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes physical or mental tension. Stresses can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness or from a medical procedure). Stress can initiate the “fight or flight” response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems.

Stress can be external and related to the environment, but may also be caused by internal perceptions that cause an individual to experience anxiety or other negative emotions surrounding a situation, such as pressure, discomfort, etc., which are deemed stressful.

JOB STRESS
Occupational stress is the harmful emotional and physical reactions resulting from interactions between the worker and her/his work environment where the demands of the job exceed the worker’s capabilities and resources.

JOB STRESSORS
It can be categorised into four major groups. Firstly, are the working conditions, including shift and week-end work, inadequate remuneration, hours of work, discrimination and lack of safety at the work situation. Secondly, there are relationships at work including quality of relationships with peers, subordinates and supervisors. Thirdly, there come role conflict and ambiguity including ill-defined roles, functions, expectations, and duties. Fourthly, there are the organisation structure and climate which include communication policy and practice, major changes in workplace, culture of the organisation, and lack of participation in decision-making. Another contributing factor is the nature of job which might result in an immense amount of physical and emotional exhaustion.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF JOB STRESS
Physical symptoms include —
- Fatigue
- Muscular tension
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Sleeping difficulties, such as insomnia.
- Gastrointestinal upsets, such as diarrhoea or constipation.
- Dermatological disorders
- High blood pressure

Emotional symptoms —
- Depression or anxiety.
- Anger, irritability, or restlessness.
- Feeling overwhelmed, unmotivated, or unfocussed.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Racing thoughts or constant worry.
- Problems with your memory or concentration.
- Making bad decisions.
- Absenteeism
- Poor quality of work.

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS
Stress management is a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. It provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and to maintain physical and psychological well-being of an individual.

STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS FOR NURSES
1. Conscious Awareness about Job Stress:
   Most Nurses in the ICU have already accepted the fact that the stress is an unavoidable part of their job. Those who have no conscious awareness tend to have a higher absenteeism due to the unpredicted level of stress. But the Critical Care Nurse who is prepared about the stress of their environment is well capable of adjusting and coping.
Asking themselves
Those who are exposed to a high level of stress as the Critical Care Nurse have some way of levelling the stress. One perfect way is asking their selves about the pressure they are feeling. They constantly remind themselves about the extent of their work, the people affected with their anxiety, the risk they are ready to take and whether the other parties are experiencing similar level of strain. Most often than not, the nurse in the ICU already understands that she can only do so much in a particular medical situation. It is also vital for her to understand that she is not the only one feeling some stress, anxiety, discomfort in a critical care situation but also the other parties especially the patients and their loved ones.

Gaining Support
It is crucial for the Critical Care Nurse to gain support from their fellow nurses as well as the patient and the families of the patients. Having some sort of open communication with the patient will definitely diminish the stress they are feeling. It will also improve their decision making, patient care and management and other ICU related situations. Critical Care Nurses also make it a point to share their feelings with their support group or other nurses. Sharing their feelings considerably reduce the strain they are feeling.

Assessing the Stress
Analysing the source of the stress is also their way of coping with it. When The Critical care Nurse is able to identify the source of the pressure, they will be able to analyse the risk involved in their constant worry. The nurse in the ICU will then be able to think about the next direction that they have to take in order to manage their stress well. ICU exposes a nurse assigned there to a high level of stress. They have a choice to let the stress affect their health and their performance or use it to grow and improve their profession and their function as a Critical Care Nurse.

2. Mindfulness Meditation
This is being aware of what is going on in the present moment without judgment. Meditation is the training of attention that cultivates mindfulness. There are many ways to meditate, and mindfulness meditation is one way for many people to start by focussing on their breathing without trying to change anything about it and merely noticing the sensations of the air moving into and out of their body. When ready, one may gently release that focus and simply observe one's moment-to-moment experience with full attention. Distractions and thoughts are to be expected as part of the experience, but they will gradually become slower and more meaningful as one's mindfulness capacity increases. Much of the emotional distress people experience is the result of thinking about upsetting things that have already happened or anticipating negative events that are yet to occur. Distressing emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt, and sadness are much easier to bear when we only focus on one moment at a time.

Mindfulness Meditation Practices
You can practice mindfulness meditation on your own anytime and anywhere. Here are four guided meditations you can listen to. They will help you remain in the present moment. Choose the one that is of the right length for you: One minute is a great duration to start and is also good if you simply do not have a lot of time. If you are more experienced or ready for an extended mindfulness session, try the 10 or 15 minute sessions.

Body Scan
Instead of training your attention on the breath, as is the case in basic mindfulness meditation, the body scan involves systematically focusing on different sensations and areas, from the head to the toes. Start from the top of your head. Slowly and deliberately, bring your attention to the surface of your skin, one inch at a time. See if you can feel your scalp, your ears, your eyelids and your nose. Continue in this manner, moving across the face, over the ears, down the neck and shoulders and all the way down to your toes.
At first, it might seem as if you do not feel anything at all. But as you progress, you might begin to notice a whole world of new sensations. Some of the feelings might be pleasant, a gentle warmth, a comfortable weight. Some feelings might be neutral — tingling or itching. And some might be unpleasant. Your feet might feel sore somewhere.
Whatever the sensation is, just note it. If you need to move to relieve real pain, do so. But try not to react — labelling the experience good or bad — even if it is unpleasant. Instead, just acknowledge what it is you are feeling, and continue with the body scan. And of course, if you realise your mind has wandered, simply note the thought, and return your attention to the body.
Training the Mind
Put most simply, \textit{meditation is a way to train the mind}. Most of the time, our minds are wandering — we are thinking about the future, dwelling on the past, worrying, fantasising, fretting or daydreaming. Meditation brings us back to the present moment, and gives us the tools we need to be less stressed, calmer and kinder to ourselves and others. “Meditation is training of our attention,” Ms. Brach said. “It allows us to step out of distracted thought, and helps us arrive in the present moment in a balanced and clear way.”

Mindfulness
There are lots of different types of meditation. Most religions have contemplative traditions, and there are plenty of secular ways to meditate, too. But in recent years, mindfulness meditation has become increasingly popular.

Basic mindfulness meditation is the practice of paying attention to the present moment with an accepting, nonjudgmental disposition. \textit{The goal is not to stop thinking, or to empty the mind}. Rather, the point is to pay close attention to your physical sensations, thoughts and emotions in order to see them more clearly, without making so many assumptions, or making up stories.

It is a deceptively simple exercise, — just to be right here, right now, without daydreaming. But with practice it can yield profound results, giving us greater control of our actions, and making room for more kindness and equanimity, even in difficult situations. With time, mindfulness meditation can even help us better understand what causes us stress, and what we can do to relieve it.

Though mindfulness meditation was inspired by Buddhist practices, today it is available as a wholly secular practice that emphasises stress reduction, cultivation of focus and development of tranquility.

“There’s a misconception that mindfulness is religious,” said Mr. Smith. “What we have to explain is that it is a stress reduction technique and a way to get yourself stronger mentally. It is a self-care practice.”

There is a large and growing body of research identifying the measurable effects of mindfulness on the body and brain, and it is catching on in professional settings including education, sports, business and even the military.

3. Time management for nurses
There are five nursing time management strategies that are useful for nurses. These include —

a) Plan your workday.
   The Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing shows that when nurses planned their time they felt they got more done with less stress.
   It can be difficult to plan when you have so much going on, but a plan will help you to become more effective, organised, and reduce your stress.

b) \textit{Identify those activities that are both important and urgent to you}: Prioritising tasks improves time management for nurses.
   Once you have a list of activities in your ‘to do’ list, put your activities in order of priority.
   Focus on those tasks that are top priority.
   This means you are putting first things first which is an important skill for good nursing time management and stress relief.
   The 5 minutes of time that it will take you to prioritise your tasks saves you time and reduce your stress.
   When you complete your tasks tick them off. This gives you a sense of achievement and closure on the task.

c) \textit{Reduce and manage interruptions in the workplace}: Create a time management schedule that has adequate breaks between important tasks.
   This buffer time allows you to manage some of your interruptions appropriately.
   Block your time for high impact activities.
   Nurses have emergencies and demands and requests of patients they need to attend to.
   However, your entire time at work is not just reactive.
   You need to seek opportunities to be proactive in ensuring that you make time for your high impact activities.
   Try to block out an hour per shift for scheduling your most important tasks with minimal interruptions.
d) **Organise yourself and your nursing workspace:** Being organised saves you time.

Having an organised workspace, whether it is a desk or a storage area will save you time in trying to find things.

Being organised also reduces stress!

e) **Delegate work and tasks at home and at work**

Delegate at work and home to improve time management for nurses

Delegation frees up your time for more important tasks and is an opportunity to train your subordinates.

Delegation is an important skill that boosts your nursing time management.

So if you are thinking that "nobody can re-bandage better than I", then it is time to think about delegation.

While there are many benefits to delegation, if done poorly, delegation increases stress, reduces nurse morale, and increases absenteeism and burnout.

4. **PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION PROCESS**

As you focus on a muscle group, begin the relaxation process by tensing the muscle group; hold that tension for five seconds. Then relax your muscles slowly for 20-30 seconds so that the tension feels like it is draining from your body. As you perform the process, tell yourself to "feel the tension go", and "let all the tension drain slowly from the muscle." Tension of a muscle group followed by a relaxation of those muscles can be repeated several times before moving on to the next muscle group. Throughout the full exercise, breathe at a steady rate.

Follow this progression —

a) **Chest:** Take a deep breath. Beginning with the abdominal area, fill the lungs with air while feeling the tension in the chest area from the expanded lungs. Expire from the top of your lungs to your abdomen while relaxing.

b) **Right foot and lower leg:** Keeping the heel down, curl the toes back until tension can be felt in the ankle and calf muscle.

c) **Right upper leg:** Tense the top of the upper leg (quadriceps) and the bottom of the upper leg (hamstring).

d) **Left foot, lower leg and upper leg:** Repeat the process identified under items b) and c).

e) **Right hand and forearm:** With the palm down, lift the hand until tension can be felt in the top of the hand, the wrist and the forearm.

f) **Right upper arm:** Tense the bicep and triceps.

g) **Right shoulder:** Shrug the shoulder toward the ear and roll the head toward the shoulder so that shoulder and ear are touching.

h) **Left hand and forearm, upper arm and shoulder:** Repeat the process identified under items e), f) and g).

i) **Jaw area:** Without damaging the teeth, bite down until tension can be felt in the jaw area.

j) **Mouth:** Purse the lips as if whistling.

k) **Chin:** Place the bottom of the tongue on the roof of the mouth and push upward.

l) **Forehead:** Wrinkle the brow.

As you begin the relaxation process, your body should feel heavy and warm. The feeling of heaviness will turn into a sensation of weightlessness as your body begins to relax. Typically, a cool band forms across the forehead as relaxation occurs. The feelings of weightlessness, warmness and a cool band across the forehead are all natural responses in the relaxation process. You will feel a sense of well-being if relaxation is achieved.

It takes several weeks to attain a full relaxation response, but you will make progress daily as you acquire the skill of relaxing. There will be days where there are setbacks followed by days of great gains. Eventually, relaxation can be achieved in short period of time in any location.

5. **AFFIRMATION**

An affirmation is a positive statement that you repeat to yourself to shift negative thoughts and feelings to positive thoughts and feelings. Affirmations are one of the quickest ways to shift out of "stress mode" and into a more relaxed and calm state of being.

The first step is to notice the negative self-talk that is going on inside your head. The second step is to gently replace that negative self-talk with positive affirmations instead.

The affirmations below are designed to reduce stress, increase personal empowerment and awaken your mind to possibilities for change, helping you live the life you feel you were meant to live.

**Choose an affirmation from the list below or create your own.**

- Challenges help me Grow
- I can see Stressful Situations as Challenges
6. **JOURNALING**

Nurses’ focus on compassion can be both rewarding and depleting. To offset the fatigue that can come with nursing care, nurses must find ways to express their feelings and tend to their own well-being. Journaling is a valuable resource that nurses can use to support their health and wellness. Using journaling to script feelings and thoughts promotes understanding, self-compassion and self-awareness. In addition, writing strengthens cognition, fosters insight, and improves emotional regulation. Although the benefits of journaling are well established, it is under-used as a method for self-care and reflection. Philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey wrote that “reflective thinking alone is educative.” Journaling provides a foundation for reflective thinking and can help anyone, including nurses, express their emotions and improve their health and well being.

**Journaling tips**

Use these suggestions to get started with your journaling —

**Medium:** Choose the medium you would like to use. Some people prefer paper and pen or pencil, while others journal on their computer or laptop. Another option is a cell phone app.

**Date entries:** Dating entries will give you a timeline and historical perspective.

**Choose when:** Decide how many days a week you would like to journal and make time in your schedule. You may consider journaling for 15 to 30 minutes each day.

**Shared or private:** Do you want to share your journal or keep it private? Your journal is about you, and you get to decide whether you share it. After you decide, ensure your journal is easily accessible for writing.

**Decide what to write about:** You will need to decide what to write about in your journal. This article highlights the benefits of writing about feelings and experiences for the purpose of reflecting on them. So, you may
consider writing a narrative about an experience and detailing what happened as well as describing your thoughts and feelings about the situation.

**Free-writing:** Free-writing is unstructured, without concern for spelling, grammar, introductions, conclusions, or outlines. It allows you to write without judgment. When we need our writing to be perfect, being creative and free-flowing with our thoughts is difficult. In free-writing, you start with a sentence such as, “Today I am beginning my journal entry. I am going to write about what happened at work yesterday…” and then start writing whatever comes to mind. Remember, you can always go back and edit later.

**Reflection:** After you complete a journal entry, reflect on what you have written and your insights about the experience. Ask yourself: What was my response? What went well? What would I do differently next time? Who do I want to be in the future? How will I become that person?

**CONCLUSION**

Stress management interventions are activities that are used by the employee and organization to improve the employee well-being also the quality of work by reduce the occupational stress, principally by either addressing the causes of stress or by reducing the impact of stress on an individual.

**REFERENCES**

4. www.pubmed.com
5. www.google.com