Nurses on the Pandemic Front-line

Crushing demands and stress

• DARRYL ALEXANDER, AFT HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTANT
• NIEHS WEB-EX MEETING
• MARCH 17, 2020
Lassa Fever –
University Hospital
2015

What happens when the system dissolves..................
What the research tells us about stress and healthcare personnel during Infectious Disease Outbreaks

“working in high-risk environments” – the SARS experience

- Associated with poor mental health outcomes
- Reported more stress and avoidance
- Higher level of posttraumatic stress
- More sleep disorders, fatigue
- Anxiety and depression post SARS

AFT Nurses on the COVID-19 frontline
King County, Washington

• Switch in CDC guidance on respiratory protection to allow use of face masks (not N-95’s) during the care of COVID-19 patients

• No communication about availability of all PPE supplies – running low on everything – face masks, gowns, etc.

• No promotion of respiratory protection alternatives such as PAPR’s when N-95’s are not available

• Arbitrary quarantining of nurses during early days of outbreak during exposure to positive patients from Life Care
What they report........

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Fatigue
- Hyper-vigilance
- Distress about potential family member exposure
- Lack of trust in their facilities
They suffer, the system suffers

NURSES NEED:

GUARANTEE OF PPE

TRAINING – CLINICAL AND BEYOND (INCLUDING STRESS RECOGNITION AND RESILIENCE)

UP-FRONT COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

ALL ESSENTIAL TO FUNCTION IN THIS DEMANDING PANDEMIC