

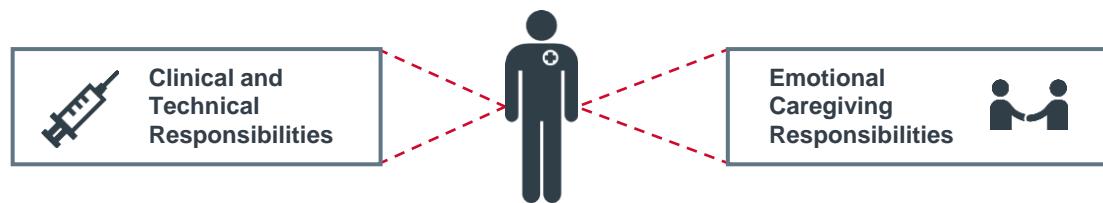
Often Neglecting the Emotional Needs of Staff

In an effort to ensure high-quality care, nursing leaders often focus on supporting the technical side of caregiving. But this technical emphasis may overshadow the importance of supporting the emotional side of being a care provider.

Unfortunately, both nurses and patients suffer if staff are not supported in their emotional caregiving responsibilities. Emotionally exhausted nurses cannot deliver effective patient-centred care.

The highs and lows that come with providing direct patient care are a natural part of nursing. However, organisations must demonstrate the same care and attention to their nurses that they expect nurses to demonstrate towards the patients.

Need to Support Both Clinical and Emotional Aspects of Caregiving



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Nursing Staff Feeling Emotionally Unsupported

“I think the hardest part is that there is very little time for reflection built into the schedule.”

“I learnt to hide my emotions as it was the culture to do so...I don't feel the mechanisms were there for [our support].”

“Everyone else seemed to be handling things okay, which made me feel even worse—like a real failure and a weakling who wasn't cut out for this kind of work.”

Frontline Staff

Source: Maslach C, “*Burnout: The Cost of Caring*,” Cambridge, MA: Malor Books, 2003, 219; Penson RT, et al., “Burnout: Caring for the Caregivers,” *The Oncologist*, 5, no. 5 (2000): 425-434; “Compassion Fatigue: Impact on Health Care Providers of Caring for the Terminally Ill,” www.physorg.com/news157808604.html; Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, London, England; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Adopting a More Proactive Approach

While many organisations have services in place should nurses need emotional support, most take either a passive or reactive approach.

Passive approaches rely on nurses themselves to seek help through open-door policies or fail to acknowledge and support the emotional toll caregiving can have on nurses. Reactive approaches often respond to immediate crises and provide support in the moment, but do not address the gradual build-up of emotional stress over time.

The following section outlines three suggested steps to take a more proactive approach:

- First, assess the emotional capacity of staff in a safe environment.
- Next, reconnect nurses with their caregiving purpose.
- And last, facilitate opportunities to share through regular staff forums where colleagues can empathise with and thus support one another.

Identifying Structured Opportunities to Build Staff's Emotional Capacity

Passive Approach



Open-Door Policy



Sole Focus on the Positive

Reactive Approach



Critical Incident Stress Debriefing



Responding to Immediate Crises

Proactive Approach

1

Assess Emotional Capacity of Staff



2

Reconnect Nurses with Caregiving Purpose



3

Facilitate Structured Opportunities to Share



Most Nurses Don't Ask for Help (Until It's Too Late)

The selfless nature of the profession means nurses often prioritise caring for others versus caring for themselves.

Many nurses do not adequately recognise when they may need additional support and may be hesitant to ask for help even when they do recognise a need.

Leaders must proactively assess the emotional capacity of their staff, because staff themselves may unfortunately wait until it is too late—when a crisis occurs or when staff are already emotionally exhausted.

Nurses Not Prioritising Self-Monitoring or Self-Care

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Failing to Care for Self

“...although nursing environments support the healing of patients, oftentimes workplaces are not conducive to the healing of nurses. Although they continue as a profession fulfilling their obligations to quality client care, **they grapple with a key ethical dilemma**, that of ‘caring for self versus caring for others’.”

*N. Glass, J. Rose
Enhancing Emotional Well-Being
Through Self-Care*

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Waiting Until a Crisis

“A central irony in nursing is that the majority of nurses perceive themselves as giving, caring people but find it hard to nurture themselves...Nurses often wait until a crisis ensues to address their needs.”

*D. Boyle
Countering Compassion Fatigue:
A Requisite Nursing Agenda*

Source: Glass N, Rose J. "Enhancing Emotional Well-Being Through Self-Care," *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 22, no. 6 (2008), 336-337; Boyle D, "Countering Compassion Fatigue: A Requisite Nursing Agenda," *OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 16, no. 1 (2011); Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Routinely Taking the Pulse

In 2009, Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement in Finland deployed a tool they call *Pulssi* (Finnish for “pulse”) to assess staff’s emotional capacity on a more regular basis. Coxa internally developed and designed *Pulssi* to solicit and analyse real-time feedback on staff’s emotional state on a continuous basis.

The Director of Nursing felt it was critical for managers and executives to have a big-picture perspective of their staff’s well-being. Through *Pulssi*, frontline nurses take a few minutes at the end of each shift to reflect on their day and record the result with a colour-coded response. Any yellow and red responses require a short, one-line comment.

Front Line Proactively Sharing Real-Time Feedback

Pulssi Nurse Assessment Tool at Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement



Case in Brief: Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement

- 64-bed hospital in Tampere, Finland with specialty focus on joint replacement
- *Pulssi* created to begin assessing the soft elements of care; *Pulssi* provides a new measurement perspective by combining hard indicators with evaluation of values and subjective experience
- Beginning in October 2009, nursing staff dedicate a few moments at close of shift to evaluate and record how their shift went
- Responses indicated with colours: green, yellow and red. Yellow and red responses require a short comment on what has changed the colour from green to discover the underlying reason
- Unit managers and DON follow *Pulssi* results on regular basis for support and continuous development

¹ Director of Nursing.

Source: Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement, Tampere, Finland; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Real-Time Data Facilitates Dialogue, Action

Unit managers and the Director of Nursing review the combined real-time data on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis and meet with staff to discuss significant patterns, assess underlying root causes, and address areas of concern that require attention.

Managers are trained to facilitate an open and blame-free discussion where the group works together to find solutions to common challenges identified through *Pulssi*.

A Structured Approach to Proactively Analyse Problems and Effect Solutions

Example of Aggregated Daily Report Generated Through *Pulssi*

MORNING SHIFT	Evaluation	%	EVENING SHIFT	Evaluation	%	NIGHT SHIFT	Evaluation	%
Green	231	93,9	Green	114	89,8	Green	75	94,9
Yellow	12	4,9	Yellow	8	6,3	Yellow	4	5,1
Red	3	1,2	Red	5	3,9	Red	0	0

Problem-Solving Process at Coxa: Example Issue Identified Through *Pulssi*

Facilitate Open Dialogue



Manager, DON¹ shared results and facilitated open discussion with unit staff

Identify Underlying Issues



Together, they identified the problem stemmed from low staffing numbers on morning and evening shifts

Respond and Adapt



Staffing adjustments made on those shifts; continued evaluation revealed changes helped alleviate workload problems on unit

1) Director of Nursing.

Source: Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement, Tampere, Finland; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.

Demonstrating Commitment to Staff Well-Being

At Coxa, *Pulssi* allows leaders to respond to problems as soon as they are identified. An isolated issue does not have time to become a larger problem that is ultimately more difficult to resolve.

Coxa reports that *Pulssi* has led to remarkable changes in the culture among staff. Previously, nurses had a tendency to withhold emotions and blame leaders for frustrations that inevitably occur in daily work. Now the staff feel open and comfortable sharing their feelings and brainstorming solutions.

Additionally, recording their responses at the end of their shift allows nurses to process their feelings, putting an end to their day and beginning their next shift with a fresh outlook.

Measurement Tool Signals Importance of Staff Morale to Both Managers, Staff

Pulssi's Impact at Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement

PAST	PRESENT
• One-sided measurement of nursing practice focused on "hard indicators"	→
• Time delays in reporting created data not reflective of daily changes	→
• Culture of withholding inner thoughts on daily practice	→
• Negative experiences and feelings carried on to next day's work	→

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Elevating Importance of Soft Values

“Measuring soft experiences next to the hard activity figures and comparing the two brings our shared values to the level of everyday life and shows the employees that management is committed to them and values the employees.”

Tuula Rantala
Director of Nursing
Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement

Source: Coxa Hospital for Joint Replacement, Tampere, Finland; Advisory Board interviews and analysis.