

HELPING STAFF WHO ARE TAKING CARE OF HER COMMUNITY



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My role: I manage a team of volunteers, that include trained mental health practitioners and other staff, who offer emotional support to hospital employees experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, second victimization, vicarious traumatization or mental health symptoms related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We help staff cope with stressors using multiple forms of support, including one-on-one peer meetings and group debriefings, a respite room, creative art therapy and compassion carts.

The gifts bags are greatly appreciated. Most recently we distributed more than 1,000 flowers. It brought light into the environment.

Respite Rooms Offer Escape:

Our respite rooms provide staff with an opportunity to take a break from their workspaces and have a quiet moment within one's workday. Staff can also take a power nap before returning to their work location. We also offer healing through creative art therapy in the room. Visual arts, meditative practices, mindfulness, and breathing exercises, are some forms of healing we use to work through trauma and manage anxiety around the pandemic.

Our respite room is on the 16th floor, so they can take in the greenery, the river and other nature scenes with the skyline. We can also see Yankee Stadium. Those are things that provide happy memories and a mental break.

People come and return later during their shift and bring more people back. Those are the indicators we're looking for when considering if this is a success.

Why I'm on the frontlines:

My heart is here. I was born in Harlem Hospital, raised in Harlem, and I live in Harlem. I have to support the people who are taking care of my community.

So, for me, being on the front line had a different meaning. It was important for me to show gratitude. I look each person in the eye to personally thank them for helping to take care of "my home." It's important to show my gratitude for a place to start.

Managing Stress: My team of volunteers do a debrief every night to reflect on our daily experience. We see and hear a lot, so it's important for us to process those feelings so we don't take this emotional load to our families. We essentially practice H3 principles to cope with stress and trauma ourselves, and that gives us an opportunity to combat compassion fatigue and burnout.