

Stress, Uncertainty, and Mental Health in the Time of COVID

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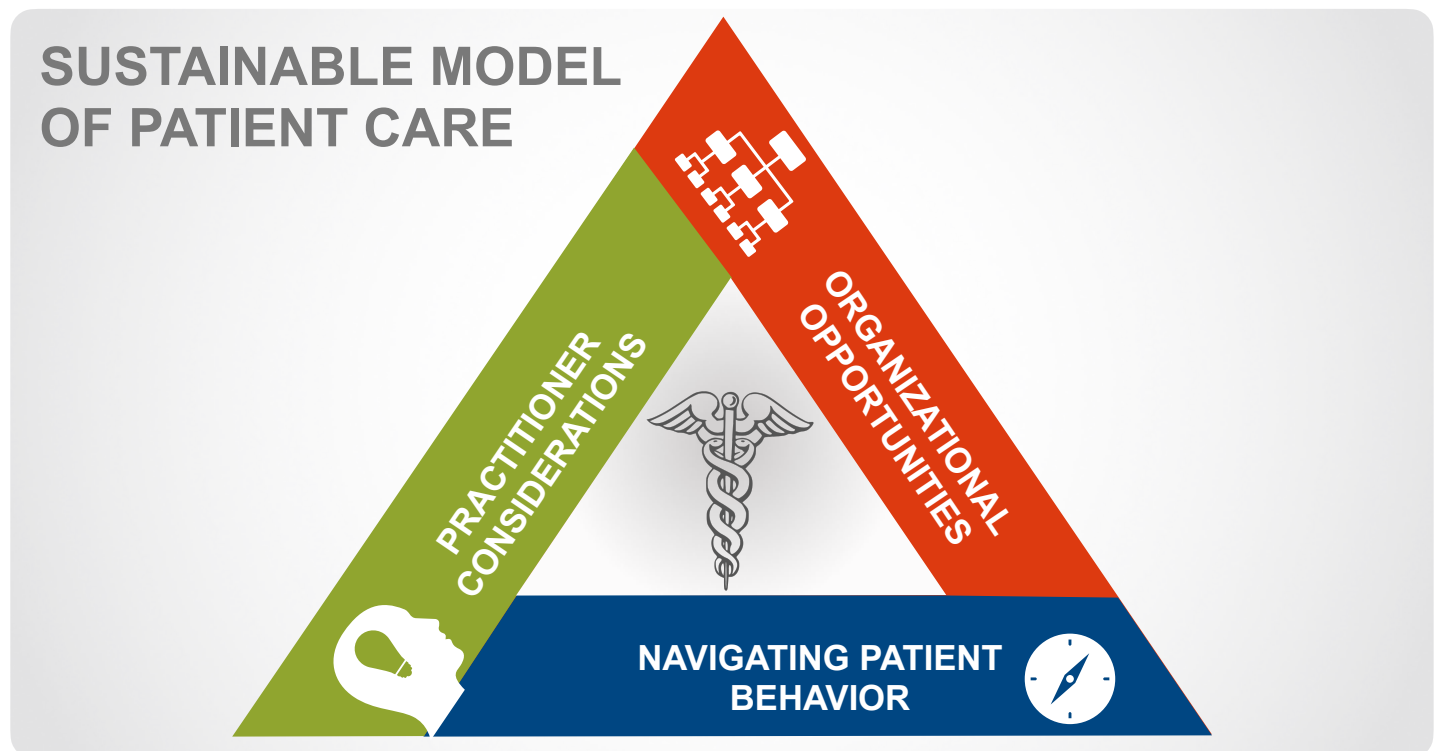


Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
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Beyond the physical health crisis of COVID-19, we are also experiencing a mental health crisis.^{1,2,3} This has put significant strain on medical staff, both professionally and personally. By focusing on three areas, medical staff and organizations can increase success and collaboration. Making improvements within the spheres of (1) Practitioner Considerations, (2) Navigating Patient Behavior, and (3) Organizational Opportunities can support a sustainable model of patient care despite significant mental health challenges.



PRACTITIONER CONSIDERATIONS

CONSIDERATION

1

FOCUS ON SELF-AWARENESS & SELF-CARE

- Expand the mind-body connection
- Re-learn how to listen and respond to our own needs
- Recognize that robust boundaries & self-care are critical to practitioner success

CONSIDERATION

2

LEARN TO FUNCTION IN A "DATA ABSENT" ENVIRONMENT

- Become comfortable with "not knowing"
- Recognize medicine as a field of "deciphering" and "finding the answers"
- Recognize that inspiring trust and a sense of safety can increase patients' engagement and compliance in the face uncertainty⁴



CONSIDERATION

3

REFLECT ON HOW PATIENT ANXIETY AFFECTS YOUR Demeanor & PRESENCE

- Recognize how patient stress and anxiety affect you, and honor your reactions
- De-personalize patient presentation while creating reasonable expectations
- Maintain patience for the patient and their support systems
- Use trauma-informed principles of patient management
- Leverage empathy and compassion as medical interventions⁴

NAVIGATING PATIENT BEHAVIOR 

WAYPOINT

1

EXPECT & HONOR DYSREGULATION IN PATIENTS

- Be clear about patient expectations
- Be trustworthy in word and deed
- Recognize and depersonalize client survival behavior
- Recognize trauma reactivity and enact trauma-informed principles to support patient health outcomes⁵

WAYPOINT

2

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT & MANAGE PATIENT ANXIETY

- Understand and honor the “need for knowledge”
- Provide transparent and realistic information
- Understand fear as an irrational but important response to perceived danger
- Develop skills to address patient fear
- Inspire confidence in the ability to navigate the unknown together

ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES 

OPPORTUNITY

1

ASK “HOW DID WE GET HERE?”

- Honor the mistakes, missteps, and missed opportunities that occurred during the battle with COVID-19
- Respect that many chose short-term responses to what became a long-term predicament
- Understand how these realities affect patient experiences

OPPORTUNITY

2

STRATEGIZE FOR THE FUTURE

- Find and amplify the "gifts of COVID"⁶
- Recognize the "forever changes" that will become medicine's "new normal"
- Leverage the positive as incentives and opportunities to support staff

NOTES

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3. Xiong, J., Lipsitz, O., Nasri, F., Lui, L. M. W., Gill, H., Phan, L., Chen-Li, D., Iacobucci, M., Ho, R., Majeed, A., & McIntyre, R. S. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 277, 55-64.
4. Trzeciak, S., Mazzei, A. (2019). *Compassionomics: The revolutionary scientific evidence that caring makes a difference*. Pensacola, Studer Group. ISBN: 9781622181063.
5. Selwyn, C. N., & Lathan, E. (2021). Helping primary care patients heal holistically via trauma-informed care. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 17(1), 84-86.
6. Despite its devastation and challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has also brought opportunities. Changes such as the ability to work remotely, the easing of certain logistics, and understanding the importance of people having space to breathe are all gifts that we may choose to retain after the crisis has ended.