

## Mental health at the frontline of the pandemic: stress management in the health workforce

Episode 6 of the webinar series

*'Health Management in action: Fostering health systems' resilience'*

### Speakers

- **Prof Dr Walter Sermeus**, Professor and Programme Director at KU Leuven Institute for Healthcare Policy; Head of the KU Leuven WHO CC on Human Resources for Health Research & Policy, Belgium
- **Mr Patrick Focken**, Magnet4Europe Coordinator, Hospital Bremerhaven-Reinkenheide, Germany

The sixth episode of the webinar series *'Health Management in action: fostering health systems' resilience'* focused on pragmatic approaches to protect the mental health of the health workforce as adopted in the Magnet4Europe research project.

The sustainability of health systems relies on their workforce, which was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic. The stressful working conditions impacted the workforce physical and mental health. [Magnet4Europe](#) is a 4-year project focussing on mental health in the workplace. It aims to redesign organisational health management to improve workforce wellbeing. KU Leuven coordinates the project, which is implemented across 65 European hospitals in 6 counties in collaboration with 65 US Magnet hospitals.

Based on the Magnet principles, **the organisational redesign starts from a gap analysis and builds an action plan tailored to and co-created with the target hospital.** Twinned with established Magnet hospitals in the US, European hospitals are guided by their counterparts on the other side of the pond. Regular communications, a critical mass of hospitals in several countries, and rigorous scientific ex-post evaluation are crucial to the success of the process.

Clinicians wellbeing was measured through surveys. **The indicators adopted are burnout levels, job dissatisfaction, intention to leave, depression, anxiety, health, and work-life balance.** For example, improvement in nurse staffing levels emerged as a top priority for both nurses (79%) and doctors (42%). The work environment impact on mental health and wellbeing is measured by 5 indicators: staffing adequacy, foundations for quality, management & leadership support, nurse-physician relationships, and involvement in hospital affairs. Depending on the results, the work environment is classified as poor, medium, or good. Where the work environment is good, higher job satisfaction, a lower percentage of burnout and a lower percentage of intention to leave are registered. This trend is common to nurses and physicians, but for doctors, the percentages of burnout and intention to leave are even higher.

Some lessons learnt stood out during the project implementation. The cause of burnout and other mental health issues is mainly situated in the organisation of work. There is a difference between individual interventions, focused on coping with stress, and organisational interventions to prevent stress. **Organisational interventions are highly preferred by staff as they work on the cause rather than the symptoms.**

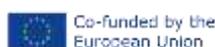
## The case study – The Hospital Bremerhaven-Reinkenheide, Germany

Bremerhaven-Reinkenheide is a community hospital which counts 800 beds and 1,900 between nurses and physicians. In the Magnet4Europe project context, this hospital developed a professional practice model and a mentoring program.

- A **Professional Practice Model** is a conceptual framework for nurses, nursing care, and interprofessional patient care that depicts how nurses practice, collaborate, communicate, and develop professionally to provide the highest-quality care. The hospital submitted surveys to nurses to understand what was not working at the organisational level. The adopted bottom-up approach enabled nurses to self-empower while being an active part of the work environment improvement.
- **Mentoring** is a professional partnership between a mentor and a mentee to accompany new colleagues into a new area of responsibility and retain them in the long term. The mentoring programme involved all hospital staff and participation and feedback were positive.

## Take-home messages

- In good work environments, higher job satisfaction, a lower percentage of burnout, and a lower percentage of intention to leave are registered. The cause of burnout and other mental health issues is mainly situated in the organisation of work.
- There is a difference between individual interventions focused on coping with stress and organisational interventions focused on preventing stress. Organisational interventions are highly preferred by staff as they work on the cause rather than the symptoms.
- COVID-19 has worsened the mental health and wellbeing of health workers, but some organisations were better prepared. Improving the work environment is especially important to attract and retain clinicians.



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