Management of Stress and Physician Wellness

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Management of stress and Physician Wellness

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Agenda

- 45-60 minutes recorded lecture
  - Review of the stress reaction
    - Discussion
  - Management of patient stress
    - Discussion
  - Physician wellness
    - Discussion

- 45-60 minutes for discussion
  - Questions
  - Case examples and consultation
Review of the stress response
Quiz!
The stress response involves both the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system.

- **Sympathetic nervous system**
  - “Fight or flight”
  - Arousal of the system

- **Parasympathetic nervous system**
  - “Rest and digest”
  - Calming
  - Conserves energy
Stress response

- Amygdala
  - Contributes to emotional processing

https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response
Stress response

- Adrenal glands and Epinephrine
  - Heart rate increases
  - Blood pressure increases
  - Breathing becomes more rapid
    - Extra oxygen is sent to the brain
  - Release of glucose and fats from storage

https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response
What health conditions might this impact?
Health conditions impacted by stress

**Physical health**
- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Chronic pain
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Sexual functioning
- Immune response

**Mental/Social health**
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance use
- Anger/irritability
- Family dynamics
Common effects of stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On your body</th>
<th>On your mood</th>
<th>On your behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Overeating or undereating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle tension or pain</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Angry outbursts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest pain</td>
<td>Lack of motivation or focus</td>
<td>Drug or alcohol misuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>Feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td>Tobacco use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in sex drive</td>
<td>Irritability or anger</td>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stomach upset</td>
<td>Sadness or depression</td>
<td>Exercising less often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www.healthline.com/health/stress/effects-on-body#1
Questions?
Management of patient stress
Management of patient stress

• Problem solving logistical factors
  • Financial
  • Family
  • Comorbid conditions and medical treatment
  • Education
  • What else??

• Healthy nervous system
  • Long-term
    • Exercise
    • Diet
  • More short-term
    • Relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system response)
What is the Relaxation Response?

- First think about teaching patient about “fight or flight” response and how that might apply to their particular condition (pain, anxiety, etc.)

- Helps to activate parasympathetic nervous system “the calming system”

- Opposite effect from the sympathetic nervous system, allowing the body to “rest and digest”
How might you explain the stress response to a patient?
What Changes?

• The relaxation response causes:
  • Decreased oxygen demand
  • Lowered heart rate
  • Lowered blood pressure
  • Lowered respiratory rate
What Changes?

- The relaxation response causes:
  - Decreased oxygen demand
  - Lowered heart rate
  - Lowered blood pressure
  - Lowered respiratory rate

- Does not change situational sources of stress, does not remove logistical challenges
  - But it is a part of the response that we can have some control over
Expanding your Toolbox as a Provider

• Relaxation strategies allow you to influence your patients with words
  • Can be a way to focus on relationship building
• Represents a way of stress relief that is easily adaptable and suitable in inpatient setting and at home
• Increases self-care and self-efficacy for patients
• Best to teach them and encourage patient to practice so they can help themselves
What Can This Help With?

• Pain
• Anxiety
• Childbirth
• IBS
• Migraines
• Tension
• Sleep
• COPD
• Anything else?
Diaphragmatic or Belly Breathing

• Sit or lie in a comfortable position, legs shoulder width apart, eyes closed, jaw relaxed, arms loose.

• Place one hand on your chest, one hand on your stomach.

• Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls. Breathe with your nose only.
  • Inhale: Concentrate on keeping your chest relatively still. Imagine you are trying to hold up a pair of pants that are slightly too big.
  • Exhale: Allow your stomach to fall as if you are melting into your chair/bed. Repeat the word “calm” to provide focus as you are practicing the exercise.

• Take several deep breaths moving only your stomach in and out with the breath. Match the length of you inhale to the length of your exhale (or double it), 4 or 3 seconds inhale, and 6 seconds exhale

• Practice 3-5 minutes daily until the breathing feels comfortable.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Tighten and then relax muscle groups moving from feet up to face
- Check in advance for problems with cramping or pain
- Emphasis on noticing the relaxed state
- Can also do a body scan and just focus on relaxing each muscle group from feet to face
Imagery

- Often used in combination with diaphragmatic breathing
- Warn to avoid when driving
- Work with patient to identify their preference

- Pleasant imagery
  - Go to a relaxing place in your mind, describe everything you see, hear, touch, taste, and smell
  - Use all 5 senses to envision your comfortable and peaceful scene

- Pain control
  - We know that mental focus on pain can lead to increased pain, so focusing on it in an intentional way can also bring relief
  - Imagine pain as “red-hot” turning to “blue-cool,” or a muscle “knot” working its way out to a “smooth line”
Distraction and Mindfulness Techniques

• Focal Point Technique
  • Focus on one point in a room (e.g., painting, bookshelf, etc.)
  • Describe the image to yourself in detail (e.g., colors, how many books, etc.)
  • Talk to yourself about that one spot
  • Breathe!

• 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - grounding using 5 senses (5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste) – can modify this in different ways

• Counting
  • In your imagination: count and imagine each number in order on a contrasting background
  • In a room: Count tiles on a ceiling, freckles on your arm, or the number of blue objects in a room
Advanced counseling techniques

• Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Thoughts
- Emotions/stress level
- Behavioral/Situation
- Physical sensations
Discussion/Questions
Physician wellness

...why is it important?
Physician wellness

• You are subject to the stress response as well
  • Importance of caring for physical and mental health

• Coping with day-to-day stress of practicing medicine
• In addition to physical and mental health, stress impacts performance
• Impact on patient care
Yerkes-Dodson Law

Performance vs. Stress

- Performance decreases as stress increases beyond a certain threshold.
- Optimal performance is achieved at moderate levels of stress.
- Performance significantly drops at very high levels of stress.
Physician burnout

• Characterized by...
  • Emotional exhaustion
  • Depersonalization (negative or detached feelings towards patients)
  • Sense of reduced accomplishment in day-to-day work

• Consequences for patient care
  • Increased medical errors
  • Reduced patient satisfaction
  • Efficiency

What challenges do you face?
What strategies do you use to cope with the stress of work?
Questions/Discussion