



MORAL DISTRESS AT THE TIME OF COVID

Moral distress can occur when staff feel they are unable to “do the right thing” - to act and work ethically. Some of us experience these feelings under normal working circumstances, like when we discharge patients to suboptimal conditions because of inadequate community resources or space pressures, or when we cannot give our residents enough time and attention because we have to respond to other essential tasks.

During our current COVID-19 pandemic, the person and family centred care that is normally at the heart of our ethical practice will be challenged by the need to protect the health of the community at large. Because of this, clinical decisions will be made in a different way, with different ethical thinking and may result in outcomes that we would find unimaginable under normal circumstances.

When we experience moral distress, staff sometimes have difficulty sleeping and feel physically unwell, emotionally drained, frustrated and guilty.

In the days ahead, we may experience greater moral distress as our teams struggle to balance the interests of our residents and patients with public health considerations. It is important to attend to the feelings that arise and reach out to others to talk them through.

Some online resources that might be helpful include:

- Oncology Nursing Society: <https://voice.ons.org/news-and-views/cope-with-moral-distress-by-focusing-on-the-possibilities>
- American Association of Critical Care Nurses, 4As to Rise Above Moral Distress: https://www.emergingrnleader.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/4As_to_Rise_Above_Moral_Distress.pdf
- Healthy Nurse/Healthy Nation blog: <https://engage.healthynursehealthynation.org/blogs/8/531>

Adapted from the Providence Health website:

<http://covid19.providencehealthcare.org/staff-support/all-staff-mental-health-and-wellness-support/moral-distress-time-covid>