Stress-management strategies can boost health care teams during pandemic

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Celebrating successes, admitting mistakes and encouraging honest communication among employees are some of the steps health care leaders should take to improve teamwork during the COVID-19

pandemic, according to a new paper from researchers at Rice University.

"Managing teamwork in the face of pandemic: evidence-based tips" appears in a recent edition of *BMJ Quality & Safety*. The article offers evidence-based recommendations for promoting effective teamwork under stressful conditions, such as those facing health care providers in intensive care units and emergency rooms.

Eduardo Salas, chair in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Rice and one of the study's authors, said there are many causes of stress at the individual, team and organizational levels that can negatively impact the performance of medical teams and compromise their quality of work. Thankfully, Salas said, there is a significant body of work on what teams can do to stay effective and mentally healthy during trying times.

"As we look toward the summer, we're not yet sure what the numbers are going to look like for COVID-19," Salas said. "It's more important than ever for our health care teams to be prepared."

The study identified seven tips to deal with stress teams may face, based on more than 30 years of studies of teams in various settings. They include:

- Celebrate successes, big and small.
- Have regular check-ins with team members and confirm that priorities and expectations are understood.
- Acknowledge contributions of all people, including those behind the scenes.
- Encourage team members to check in and support each other, particularly more experienced individuals helping those who are new to a job. Thank those who offer assistance.
- Acknowledge areas in need of improvement and admit when you

have questions. Thank individuals who admit mistakes or offer dissenting views.

- Be a good listener and help [team members](#) address concerns with their own work groups.
- Boost team resilience by anticipating and planning for [stressful situations](#), activity surges and setbacks; identifying strategies that are not working; and apologizing for bad behavior under stress.

Salas noted that these tips are useful beyond health care.

"We're very lucky that there is a field of research that can provide evidence-based tips on how to work better together, especially in stressful times," Salas said. "We hope that these tips will be useful to all essential workers, including those in [health care](#), during COVID-19."

More information: Scott I Tannenbaum et al. Managing teamwork in the face of pandemic: evidence-based tips, *BMJ Quality & Safety* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjqs-2020-011447](#)

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