Moral distress results from managing the complex ethical issues in healthcare practice and patient care. Those morally stressing situations can make clinicians feel unable to provide the care they think is best based on their professional standards of practice and their values. While the confidence, moral clarity, and self-efficacy that come with moral strength can help clinicians make difficult ethical decisions, moral strength can likewise be eroded in the healthcare environment.

While support and training efforts to help clinicians develop coping skills, resiliency, and enhanced moral strength are important, the authors caution that it is imperative to also address organizational and systemic factors that contribute to moral distress and ways to support clinicians' capacity to act with moral strength.

"More research into the subject is needed in order to prioritize educational and institutional change that address the ethical complexities in healthcare institutions, as well as interventions to prevent the experience of moral distress from leading to self-doubt and to the erosion of moral strength," said Ulrich.

The commentary is set for upcoming publication in the National Academy of Medicine's NAM Perspectives and is co-authored by Christine Grady, PhD, RN, Chief of the Department of Bioethics, Clinical Center, National Institutes of Health.

More information: nam.edu/perspectives/

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