

AM I DOING THE RIGHT THING? MORAL DISTRESS AND INJURY

The coronavirus pandemic is challenging the way healthcare operates and how we work. This unprecedented situation is having implications such as:-

- **Doctors being asked to set limits on treatment thresholds**
- **Nursing ratios being reduced**
- **Managers needing to cancel elective surgery**
- **Struggling to offer support and information to families**
- **Staff feeling unable to do their job in the way they usually do**

Moral distress occurs when you know the ethically correct action to take but feel powerless to take that action. Moral injury is the “psychological distress that results from actions, or lack of them, which violate someone’s moral or ethical code”. You may experience:

Feelings of anger, guilt, disgust at yourself or others
Thoughts such as ‘I’m a terrible person’ ‘I’m not doing my job well’
You might feel angry at managers, the government or authority figures
You might struggle to function at work

Protecting everyone

- Provide staff (especially redeployed staff) with clearly stated information about what they are likely to encounter. Do not sugar coat or provide false reassurance
- Use plain English when communicating.
- Actively monitor staff wellbeing by asking ‘how are you?’ every day.
- Team leaders should help staff make sense of morally challenging decisions being made by talking clearly and openly about them.
- Identify your ‘go to peer’ who you would “debrief” the day with before going home
- Empathise and check in with each other after tough decision. Reach out to those who don’t join these conversations. Try to promote a helpful perspective: ‘That was awful, but we did the best we could to provide the best care we could, given the circumstances’
- Notice the people who don’t want to talk – avoidance can be harmful but don’t make people talk if they are not ready

If you are worried about team or individual wellbeing, seek support from Employee Wellbeing:
02920 744 465 Employee.wellbeing@wales.nhs.uk