

Impact of Stress and Shortages on Critical Care Physicians



As hospitals continue to struggle with accelerating rates of coronavirus infections, hospitalisations, and deaths, the impact of the pandemic and the experiences of critical care physicians caring for the sickest COVID-19 patients should be examined. This is especially important because infection rates are increasing, and there are concerns about the capacity of the acute care system to care for severely ill COVID-19 patients.

Critical care doctors have played a central role in caring for seriously infected COVID-19 patients. The emotional and physical wellbeing of these doctors has a direct impact on the capacity of the healthcare system to operate under the continuous pressure of the pandemic. Anecdotal reports suggest that critical care physicians are becoming overwhelmed. However, data about how these physicians feel about the availability of resources or how they are coping with the pandemic is still scarce.

Research by ABIM, based on a survey of 2375 critical care physicians in the U.S., found that these physicians had high levels of stress associated with COVID-19. 70% reported extreme levels of emotional distress or physical exhaustion. Stress was higher among physicians reporting shortages of ICU-trained staff, medication, equipment, and personal protective equipment. Two other cross-sectional international studies report that ICU physicians have been experiencing high levels of stress during the pandemic. However, there is no recent data that examines how the experiences of critical care physicians have evolved through the pandemic.

This new survey included the same respondents that originally participated in the research conducted by ABIM. The survey was conducted to understand how high stress levels and shortages faced by physicians have evolved during these challenging times. The responses were compared from the first survey conducted in Spring 2020 and the second survey conducted in Fall 2020.

The survey included critical care physicians in the U.S. The effects of physician emotional distress/physical exhaustion (low, moderate or high), and insufficient training staff and shortages in medication, equipment or personal protective equipment (PPE) were measured. 2375 critical care attending physicians responded to the survey.

As per the findings, two-thirds of the respondents reported moderate or high levels of emotional distress in the Spring of 2020 compared to the Fall. The percentage of respondents reporting moderate or high levels of emotional distress decreased from 67.6% in the Spring to 50.7% in the Fall. 46.5% of Fall respondents reported staffing shortages compared to 48.3% in Spring. Shortages of medication and equipment reported in Spring were alleviated. PPE shortages declined by half but still remained substantial.

Overall, the responses indicate that stress, static and personal protective equipment shortages faced by critical care physicians remain high. Higher stress levels were reported among women in both periods. These results should be taken seriously as they can determine the ability of healthcare workers, especially critical care workers, to meet the ongoing and future demands of the pandemic.

Source: [Critical Care Medicine](#)

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