

Transcript of Mary Doherty on Staff Support

So with all of this going on, how should hospitals respond? Well I think the first thing is just to take a brief moment to acknowledge and remember one of the deep challenges that the National Health Service has always had, and that's its ability to manage its two main tasks.

Number 1, to look after its patients and number 2, to take care of the staff looking after them. This is a time when hospitals need to do both of these things and understand that they can't do one without the other. But beyond that the first line response must simply be to really focus on what workers need to be able to do their jobs, it's that straightforward.

They need equipment to perform their job safely, they need to be honestly briefed on what to expect and what expectations are on them. They need food and rest, they need to be encouraged and thanked and their value communicated to them, and they also need to know who to ask for help when they need it. They need their leaders to be accessible and honest and frank about the situation, including the ongoing uncertainty, and also mistakes that will be made. They need to know that their team and their leaders have got their back and that they support them.

But there will also be people that need more than practical help and it's really incumbent on the organisation to make sure that this is available for them.

Firstly, there needs to be a culture around the fact that it's ok to ask for help or that it's ok to be experiencing difficult feelings. People will be experiencing a range of things from anxiety to distress through to grief, and these feelings, these experiences need to be validated and acknowledged as normal, as acceptable and also supported within the workplace.

But there will also be some people who need more than their feelings validated, who might be actually developing symptoms of mental health problems and their needs to be clear systems, mechanisms and pathways to identify these people, and to get them help when they need it.