

# Moral Injury- supporting our managers and their teams during and after Covid-19



Pride in our care

# Purpose

- To understand what moral injury is
- To raise awareness of moral injury and its implications for our colleagues
- To explore how we can prepare and support our colleagues to deal with events that may cause moral injury

# What is moral injury

- A concept taken from military response which refers to a situation where someone:

*Does something, doesn't do something, or feels betrayed*

- This leads to conflict within their moral code

- It could be an event occurs where you can't do what you want to do and this creates an awful dilemma
- For example- a clinician wants to want to give the best healthcare, but they don't have the resources they need, and therefore a bad outcome occurs

# How does it apply to the NHS during Covid-19?

- There are likely to be situations where our colleagues have to make difficult choices
  - E.g. in physical healthcare:
    - Forced to allocate limited resources (1 ventilator between 2 patients with similar levels of need)
  - E.g. mental healthcare
    - Being prevented from giving best care by being restricted by infection control or remote working
- Clinicians want to do things they aren't able to do as they normally would
- There is no easy way of making the decision

# Key messages for managers and teams

Moral Injury has the potential to :

- Develop into PTSD, depression or other mental health problems
- Healthcare staff are at increased risk of moral injury and mental health problems when dealing with challenges of the covid-19 pandemic- this can affect anybody
- The more moral dilemmas individuals are exposed to the, the more vulnerable they are to develop future mental health problems
- Creates the opportunity to raise the awareness with all staff groups
- Allows for frank and honest discussion around the current situation
- Staff can anticipate and prepare for potentially morally injurious they may be exposed to

# Helping teams prepare for 'morally injurious' events

1. Demonstrate honest, empathic and compassionate leadership
2. Hold frank discussions about the challenges and situations staff are likely to face
3. Pre-empt problems- give teams adequate time to explore morally ambiguous situations and develop a plan of how they would handle each scenario
4. Reassure teams that 'we are all in this together, you are not alone'
5. Frame the event as a temporary occurrence and not what would happen "under normal circumstances"

For example: "last year you would have done xyz to treat a similar pt. in best way, next year you will be back to normal and you will do xyz.....its just temporary at the moment that you can't and have to make a difficult choice in a difficult situation"

# Further ways to support managers and teams

- Teams are best source of support for individuals
- Staff can be supported by reinforcing teams and providing regular contact to discuss decisions and check on wellbeing, signposting to staff wellbeing service if needed
- Complete early referrals to mental health support for initial assessment
- Encourage teams to talk with others- e.g. Schwartz Rounds or team talks (bring staff together who have faced similar challenges to talk about what went well/ what didn't)
- Once the crisis begins to recede, staff must be actively monitored, supported, and, where necessary, provided with evidence-based treatments

# Advice for people managers...

“Resilience doesn’t lay in an individual, it lays between individuals”

- Acknowledge the challenges people face will be different for everyone
- Be proactive- take action now
- Managers and supervisors need to have the time, resources, skills to have **psychologically sensitive conversations** with their teams
- Social networks and bonds at work need to be strong
- You will not be on your own, you are supported
- You are indemnified against clinical negligence claims



# Further resources

- Dr Victoria Williamson, King's Centre for Military Health Research, Kings College London

<https://www.supporttheworkers.org/briefing-notes/moral-injury>

- Dr Neil Greenberg, King's Centre for Military Health Research, Kings College London

<https://www.bmj.com/content/368/bmj.m1211>

# Questions for team discussion

Here are a few questions to help you think about moral injury

*“Moral injury describes the challenge of simultaneously knowing what care patients need but being unable to provide it due to constraints that are beyond our control”.*

1. Have you ever done something that you felt was morally right, but also felt that it challenged you emotionally, psychologically, or clinically?
2. Have you ever done something that is at odds with your moral code?
3. Have you ever witnessed an act that challenged your moral code?
4. How were you affected by these experiences?
5. What support would you prefer/ what support might a team member prefer if their moral code has been affected?