



OPERATIONAL AND HUMANITARIAN MISSION STRESS FIRST-AID FOR CAREGIVERS

“The most important resource in the US military is not a ship, tank or plane, it is our people. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health and fitness of each individual is critical to maintaining an effective fighting force. We have the ultimate responsibility in ensuring the medical readiness of our war fighters; to make sure that our medical forces are prepared, trained and deployed with the right capabilities.”

Vice Admiral Adam M. Robinson Jr., MC
Surgeon General of the Navy

BACKGROUND

Preserving the psychological health of service members and their families is one of the great challenges facing military leaders of today. Modern psychological, medical, and spiritual frameworks offer military leaders the understanding and tools to help meet this challenge. Operational and humanitarian missions have many identifiable stressors ranging from daily hassles to extreme trauma. Out of all of these stressors it is important for leaders to be mindful of the four sources of stress injury – LIFE THREAT, LOSS, INNER CONFLICT, and FATIGUE. Caregivers and support teams use the stress continuum, combat and operational stress first-aid (COSFA) models as assessment tools for leaders. Medical leader should use the stress continuum, combat and operational stress first-aid (COSFA) models as an assessment tools for their commands. The COSFA framework of the five C’s – COVER, CALM, CONNECT, COMPETENCE, and CONFIDENCE – forms the basis for understanding core issues that impact individuals and the command as a whole. Military leaders and their leadership team’s should perform the five core functions of Combat and Operational Stress Control (COSC) - STRENGTHEN, IDENTIFY, MITIGATE, TREAT, and REINTEGRATE – that are essential for the prevention, identification, and care of our staff to prevent adverse stress outcomes across the combat and operational stress continuum.

CORE NAVY MEDICINE LEADER ACTIONS

- **STRENGTHEN-** Effective and realistic pre-deployment training, enforce rest and restoration periods, shift and sleep hygiene, teach staff how to use COSFA to provide psychological support to the patients and each other, keep crew informed of changing deployment timeline, call attention to issues and outcomes that are associated with compassion satisfaction.
- **IDENTIFY-** Know high risk work areas, monitor long-stay patient and staff attachments, staff should know stress continuum and stress injury warning signs, watch for rumors that produce extremes of hope or pessimism, watch for compassion fatigue with triage teams.
- **MITIGATE-** Use regular after action reviews, team leaders to discuss 5 C’s after every shift, leaders to expect verbal reports about unit and work centers to address the five C’s, command expectation of shipmate care and breaking the code of silence, morale and recreation strategies, identify respite rotations (tasks that contribute to the mission but decrease or change exposure).
- **TREAT-** Identify command resources to address stress injured staff, team leaders are expected to pull a staff member off line for short reset breaks, use leader led after action reviews following high stress or critical events; consider team level rest and reset.
- **REINTEGRATE-** Be prepared to shift team members and support those who had diminished capacity and are ready to work back into a full pace.

KEY TALKING POINTS

- Navy Medicine leaders need to be able to recognize caregiver stress and use tools and resources to conserve our caregivers who deploy in support of the Navy mission.
- The five COSFA C’s identify the core needs of people exposed to stress demands associated with disasters, life threat, major loss, moral and ethical conflict, and sustained fatigue.
- Shipmate to shipmate support based on early recognition, peer intervention, and taking supportive action is the key to sustaining caregivers in operational and humanitarian missions.
- Strategic Goal: Agile Forces- The Naval Forces will have the right capabilities to deliver consistent, appropriate, and timely health care services across the entire range of joint military operations.