



Care workers have been at the forefront of battling Covid-19

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Can Psychological First Aid help improve care workers' wellbeing?

Academics at Northumbria University, Newcastle, and the University of Highlands and Islands, Scotland, are investigating Psychological First Aid training as a tool to support nurses working in the care home sectors' mental health and emotional wellbeing amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are approximately [1.8 million people](#) working in care homes across the UK, all of whom have faced challenging times due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

They have been at the forefront of battling Covid-19 while growing international evidence has shown that the virus disproportionately impacts people living in nursing and residential care homes, with subsequent high mortality.

In order to support the frontline staff such as care workers through these trying and uncertain times, in June last year it was announced by the Minister for Mental Health Nadine Dorries that staff and volunteers at the forefront of the national coronavirus response would be able to access a free Psychological First Aid training course.

Now, academics from Northumbria University and the University of Highlands and Islands are conducting a study to evaluate the usage and efficacy of Psychological First Aid for people working in the care home sector throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Funded by the RCN Foundation, the research will ultimately enable the team to make recommendations regarding further implementation of Psychological First Aid. It will also help them to influence policy and the development of support services for healthcare staff for any future crises.

[Dr Mariyana Schoultz](#), the project lead and Senior Lecturer in Mental Health in Northumbria's [Department of Nursing, Midwifery and Health](#), said: "We feel honoured to lead on such an important project. Care home staff have had a particularly hard time during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study will enable us to see if this is a useful intervention for frontline care staff and how we can support care homes and their staff further during crises."

What is Psychological First Aid?

First developed by the World Health Organisation, Psychological First Aid (PFA) is the globally recommended training for supporting people during emergencies and offers guidance on delivering psychosocial care in the immediate aftermath of an emergency event.

Although PFA training was originally created for people to support others, it has recently also been identified by scientists as a suitable way of helping care workers take care of their own mental health and wellbeing, therefore reducing distress caused by traumatic events such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

The key aims of Psychological First Aid are to establish feelings of safety, calmness, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope by providing an environment that is calming, comfortable, and where people can decompress and feel heard.

As part of the new study, the research team are asking anyone who works in a care home to complete a 15-minute [online survey](#) which will help them to identify where in the UK Psychological First Aid is being used and how it was implemented.

The researchers will then compare levels of safety, calmness, self and community efficacy, connectedness and hope, stress, resilience and coping in care home staff working in care homes that have implemented PFA against those who work in settings which have not.

Dr Michelle Beattie, Lecturer in Nursing at the University of Highlands and Islands, said: “We are delighted to be involved in this important study. We know the challenges that care staff have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic and this study contributes to establishing effective interventions to support them. The study also fits well with our wider portfolio of research into care homes.”

Focus groups with care home staff in each UK nation will also be conducted to examine in detail the experiences, benefits, drawbacks and impact of PFA training on their coping and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Deepa Korea, Director of the RCN Foundation said: “Nurses and other care staff working within the care home sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have faced significant challenges and made many personal sacrifices to continue to care for their patients. This has inevitably had a detrimental impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing, something that the government has rightly recognised with their offer of Psychological First Aid to support these staff.

“However, we need to better understand the evidence behind whether PFA is an effective approach to support staff within this setting, and this important research will help to do that. The RCN Foundation is delighted to have commissioned this study and we look forward to seeing the findings. Ultimately, we hope that this research will contribute towards our aim of supporting and strengthening nursing and care.”

The project is entitled the EMPATH study - **E**valuation and **M**easurement of **P**sychological first-**A**id in **T**he care **H**ome sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Anyone interested in taking part in the research can [access the anonymous survey here](#).

More detailed information for participants is available on the study's [Participant Information Sheet](#).

- Ends -

Notes to editors:

About the Royal College of Nursing Foundation

The RCN Foundation is an independent charity, which is part of the RCN Group, and is solely dedicated to championing and supporting nursing staff in the UK.

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