

## Difäm Health Community (DHC)

### Podcast: Staff management

Hello and welcome to the Difäm Health community. My name is XXX and today I am here with my colleague XXX. Last week we talked about the appropriate layout of a health-care facility and dealt with patient wards, visitor areas and work areas in order to reduce the risk of infection. In today's episode we are going to talk about staff management in a health-care facility and what must be considered when planning and determining the needs of health-care workers. So let us get into that!

Exactly; as we have already learned in the last episode, the design of a health-care facility can have a huge impact on reducing the risk of infection. But since viruses and bacteria often spread from one human to another it is important that also staff act in an appropriate way in order to reduce any risk of infection and that there are enough health-care workers in every shift. This becomes especially important when a health-care facility is confronted with a sudden outbreak of an infectious disease.

**How do we know how many health-care workers we need on site in the first place?**

In the best case there is somebody responsible for staff planning in your health-care facility. There are certain tools that can be used like the "WHO Workload Indicators for Staffing Need method" and it can be done by analyzing the need of health-care workers in the facility for a certain time. The need does not only depend on the number of patients your facility has but also on the type of patients you care for.

**Okay, so we must make sure that there are enough health-care workers for our patients. And what exactly do you mean by type of patient?**

Patients can be in a health-care facility for many different reasons and so need different levels of care some of which are more time consuming than others. For example a young patient that has broken his arm needs less help with feeding, washing or going to the toilet than an old person who is severely weakened from pneumonia. This needs to be considered in the daily planning of personnel requirements. Another important aspect to take into account is the time for breaks during shifts. Health-care workers working for too many hours without a break are more likely to make mistakes. Therefore it should always be made sure that there is enough staff to allow the health-care workers to take breaks. To ensure that patients receive adequate care during shift changes, there should be scheduled overlaps in-between shifts. During these overlaps a handover with important information about the patients can be exchanged between the health-care workers.

Okay, this is a lot to think about in everyday life on a ward! But what do we do in situations that occur suddenly and are unexpected like for example the outbreak of an infectious disease? I mean we had to deal with COVID-19 pretty unplanned!

Yes, you are right, I think the COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone fairly off-guard! But we could see that especially during sudden disease outbreaks health-care workers are quickly understaffed. In these situations stable and reliable staff management is particularly important. It is essential to ensure that there are enough health-care workers on site to care for all patients. But as you can imagine this is also one of the biggest challenges because as you know in many health-care facilities the staff cover is thin without any particular incidents!

Yes, overstaffing is a lot rarer than understaffing... But what could be a solution to this problem?

Well, solution is a big word...but there are definitely ways to reduce the workload of health-care workers. The easiest way is to involve the people who are there anyway - visitors and relatives - more into patient care. They can help washing, dressing and feeding patients that are not infectious and accompany them to the toilet. But you need to remember what we have learned in the last episode: the visitors should be aware of hygienic basics and must have access to adequate PPE and sanitary facilities. Especially when they are involved in patient care they should not change every day.

Getting help from the visitors sounds like a clever possibility to relieve the health-care workers. And how do we deal with the infectious patients or patients that have no visitors?

Infectious patients should always be separated on isolated wards. When caring for them there are a few rules that must be followed in order to avoid the spread of infection in a health-care facility. In the best case you have health-care workers in your facility that only care for isolated patients and do not come into contact with other patients. This rule should be maintained even when understaffed. Especially then it is very important that the health-care workers act in a way that reduces the risk of infection: for themselves and for all other patients.

What can health-care workers do during their shift in order to avoid the spread of infection?

As I already said, staff that cares for patients with infectious disease should not get in contact with other patients. Every health-care worker should wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with clean water and soap. Before and after caring for a patient they must disinfect their hands thoroughly. And then there is the use of PPE: gloves should always be changed in-between patients. When caring for patients with infectious diseases you should never skip putting on all of the required equipment. It is vital that no matter how busy the health-care facility is and how many patients must be looked after to remember that you should never save time by scaling down hygienic measures. Even though that might save a minute or two, you can cause life-threatening consequences for you and your patients. Maintaining hygienic conditions in busy situations is not easy but very important and should always be prioritized.

Which tasks should be dropped or prioritized in outbreak situations should not be the health-care workers' individual decision. It is part of the responsibility of staff management to ensure that everybody knows how to act in any situation. Regulations and rules make it easier for everybody to be able to react fast and appropriately to new situations without feeling insecure and losing time.

Okay, I got it! Let me sum up what we have learned today: the need of health-care workers can be determined with tools like the 'WHO Workload Indicators of Staffing Need method' or by simply analyzing the situation in your health-care facility. Shifts should be planned in a way that allows proper handovers and breaks. There should also be clear guidelines provided by the staff management on the matter of right behaviour and the prioritization of tasks in various situations. To relieve the burden of health-care workers especially in understaffed situations, visitors and relatives could help with caring for patients. But there are things that must always be kept up even in stressful situations: designated staff for infectious patients and hygienic conditions of care. No matter how busy it is never forget to protect yourself and others by washing and disinfecting your hands and always wear clean PPE. Did I miss anything?

No, I think that's it! And I think it is enough for today. We hope you enjoyed today's episode. Until our next podcast, stay safe and be blessed! Goodbye!

Guidelines on Core Components of Infection Prevention and Control Programmes at the National and Acute Health Care Facility Level:

<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/251730/9789241549929-eng.pdf?sequence=1>