

Spotlight

The toll of COVID-19 on our healthcare heroes

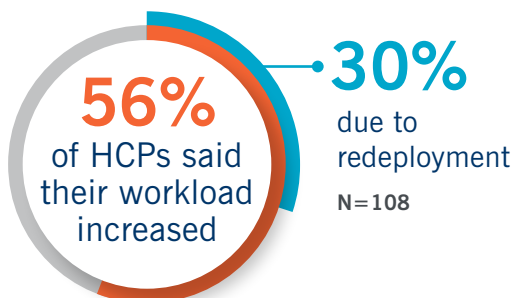
How should we adjust our engagements with HCPs in PMR?

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the world, most notably on healthcare services and healthcare professionals working in these environments. With the vaccine roll-out in full force and times beginning to appear more promising, we thought we would look back to better understand the impact COVID-19 has had on our healthcare heroes. This piece of research was done to help champion the voices of HCPs to help us understand the ways we should engage with them moving forward and how to work with them with empathy, so they don't become forgotten heroes following these difficult times.

Adelphi, in collaboration with Medefield, conducted a survey across a 3-week period, from 17th February to 8th March 2021, with Cardiologists, GPs, Oncologists and Rheumatologists from across Europe, as well as interviews with different healthcare professionals in the UK. In this article we share first-hand accounts of how COVID-19 has impacted the lives and wellbeing of HCPs.

Taking on extra workload

We have all seen and heard of the extra pressures on healthcare systems during the pandemic. So, it should come as no surprise to hear that workload was a key theme throughout this research.



The extra pressures of COVID-19 are exhausting for some HCPs, in particular junior staff and when other conditions such as dementia are present.



I was looking after 12 patients; quite heavy males with varying mobilities, and was having to do all the turns and observations myself. Everyone was COVID-19 positive, and running in between them was exhausting. A lot of patients had dementia so were getting up in the night, it was horrible. There was one point where I went to another healthcare professional in tears just asking for some help.

Nurse



Feeling unprotected and out of my depth

With these added pressures on HCPs, increased responsibility also comes hand in hand. Some HCPs state that they have been taking on new or unfamiliar tasks alongside their day-to-day roles, which has led to them feeling out of their depth and overwhelmed.



One night shift, completely understaffed and looking after COVID-19 patients, I didn't have the proper PPE. You're meant to be fit-tested for the specialised masks; we didn't have any or they didn't have any that would fit my face.

Healthcare Assistant



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Increased stress

Linked to the above themes, understandably there has been a huge increase in level of stress, not only on healthcare resources but particularly on the individuals delivering services.



25%

of HCPs strongly agree that COVID-19 has negatively affected their mental health due to their job

N=108



30%

strongly agree that COVID-19 has negatively affected job satisfaction

N=233



51%

strongly agree COVID-19 has negatively affected patients' mental health

N=233

In particular, GPs strongly agree COVID-19 has negatively affected their mental health more than other specialties. Amongst these, Cardiologists were slightly more impacted in terms of mental health than Rheumatologists and Oncologists. Over half of participants also strongly agree that COVID-19 has affected their patients' mental health.

The constant need for adaptability due to adjusting job roles and redeployment in order to cope with COVID-19 has heightened stress levels in HCPs, with one Nurse recounting their move from a Paediatric Specialist ward onto a COVID-19 Adult ward to help balance workload.



During the first wave of COVID-19, I was working on a paediatric intensive care unit. However, due to the higher demand I was placed over on the adult side to care for adults who required mechanical ventilation. I felt unequipped and unsupported within this challenge which led to stress and dissatisfaction in a role that I normally loved.

ICU Nurse



To tell someone they might not get the same treatment they would have 6 months ago, because of what's going on outside, is really difficult because you don't have any clear answers.

ONC Nurse



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We are all aware of the impact the pandemic has had on access to cancer treatment for some patients; something which has also taken its toll on HCPs.



One of the big things we focus on is the 28-day faster diagnosis, so you have to tell the patient their cancer diagnosis within 28 days. At the beginning [of the pandemic] before they'd even set up the telephone clinics, there were patients waiting over a month as they had no idea how to do anything. Especially tumour sites where you have to have a clinical examination, they didn't want to let the patients come in, so they were just waiting for their first appointment for weeks and weeks. It stresses everyone out because you can't do your job properly.

MDT Coordinator



There is just no time

The strain on HCPs not only causes high levels of stress in the workplace, but it also has a knock-on effect on home life.



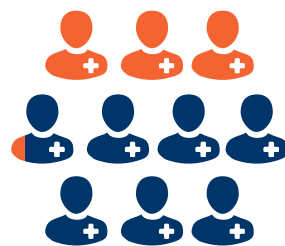
1/5 of participants strongly disagreed that they have a good work-life balance due to COVID-19

N=152



that they are satisfied with their role

N=152



32%

strongly agree that they plan to stay in their role for the next 2 years

N=152

It was also noted that when HCPs were able to take time off, they were unable to participate in their usual hobbies or stress-relieving activities due to COVID-19 restrictions. This therefore did not allow for complete relaxation or stress management.



COVID-19 has not allowed outlets such as golf or catching up with family. But it's also probably not affected us as much as others who are more isolated; we still have to go into work, so we see our colleagues and friends, so life feels somewhat more normal. We did have a lack of PPE, now, several months later (too late), they have given us protective masks.

Paramedic



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Alongside work-life balance, a lack of time during working hours is also a key factor impacting patients, with HCPs unable to allocate the time and resources that they usually would have done.



20%

strongly agree that COVID-19 had a negative effect on how HCPs are able to treat their patients

N=233



Especially during the second wave when we were testing people more and more cases were showing up positive. The wards were just completely understaffed so you didn't get to give as much attention to the patients that you would usually have been able to. Working as a healthcare assistant, a lot of the time my role is to sit and have a chat with patients; you help them with going down to the shop or going to the loo. But we were just so rushed off our feet, we couldn't give them all the attention we would want to.

HCP



Pulling together

In stressful and unprecedented times, it is key for teams and colleagues to pull together and support each other. Long working hours and difficult working conditions have resulted in HCPs relying on each other and members of the public for support more than ever.



31%

of survey participants strongly agreed that they felt supported by their colleagues during COVID-19

N=108



1/5

HCPs strongly disagreed to feeling supported by either their colleagues, management or government

N=108

Conclusion

Along with ways in which we can all imagine the pandemic has affected countless lives across the globe, the increased stress on HCPs due to redeployment, understaffing and high workload has contributed to many individuals feeling overwhelmed and dissatisfied with their careers.

So how has this impacted the research we do?

Adelphi Research has remained committed to undertaking the highest quality research with HCPs throughout the pandemic whilst being flexible and continuing to assess our practices regularly. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been aware of the great impact it has had on the workload and life of HCPs and are committed to maintaining a flexible approach to market research. We have also increased our capacity to undertake research over the telephone and via web platforms in place of face-to-face interviews, to best fit in with the busy and ever-evolving work life of HCPs, ensuring we are able to gather high-quality data for our clients whilst respecting the increased pressure and stress many HCPs are under.