Caring for Those Who Care for Lives: How an Innovative Program Can Transformed the Well-Being of the ECMO Team

Luciana Tagliari MD; Briana A. Ferreira MD; Wdielle M. C. Oliveira PT; Camila M. Bessa PT MSc; Gabriel F. Santiago MD; Eduardo Fontena MSc MD; André C. Ávila PT; Aloysio Saulo M. I. J. B. B. Junior MD; Lucas S. Cruz RN; Ligia N. Matos RN MSc

Hospital Copa D'or, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Background:

ECMO professionals are frequently exposed to high levels of physical and emotional stress, increasing the risk of burnout and negatively affecting team performance and patient care. To address these challenges, a structured well-being initiative, Caring for the Caregiver, was developed.

Methods:

In 2025, an institutional survey was conducted to identify unmet needs and opportunities for improvement related to physical, emotional, and workplace well-being among ECMO team members. A total of 90 professionals directly involved in ECMO care participated, including physicians (33.3%), nurses (58.89%), and physiotherapists (7.78%). Based on the identified demands, targeted interventions were implemented, including delivery of snacks directly to care units to improve comfort, workplace physiotherapy to prevent occupational injuries, financial incentives recognizing ECMO expertise, specialized training programs designed to reduce emotional stress and increase confidence, and recruitment of a dedicated psychologist to address the team's needs through both individual and group interventions.

Results:

Six months after, the survey was repeated to assess the program's impact and identify new opportunities for improvement. Participation increased from 90 to 114 professionals. The proportions of physicians and nurses remaind similar, while the number of physiotherapists increased, suggesting broader multidisciplinary engagement. The most impactful recognized initiatives were the training programs and psychological support, as they provided structured emotional support and professional guidance.

Conclusion:

Caring for the Caregiver is a institutional program supporting the physical and emotional health of ECMO professionals.Through targeted interventions with continuous reassessment, it promotes workforce well-being and strengthens caregiver support as a key component of high-quality ECMO care.

Christina Maslach, Michael P. Leiter. Understanding the burnout experience: recent research and its implications for psychiatry. World Psychiatry. 2016;15(2):103–111.

Tait D. Shanafelt, John H. Noseworthy. Executive Leadership and Physician Well-being: Nine Organizational Strategies to Promote Engagement and Reduce Burnout. Mayo Clinic Proceedings. 2017;92(1):129–146.

Victor M. Montori. A Crisis of Caring: Burnout in Health Care and How We Can Do Better. Mayo Clinic Proceedings. 2019;94(9):1621–1624.

CON EL RESPALDO