

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on VA Healthcare Workers

Research Study FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out how working in a VA healthcare facility during the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted frontline healthcare workers and how VA can best support them. To do this, we need to learn about the experiences of workers who have moral and psychological distress related to their work during the pandemic as well as those who do not. We hope to learn about conditions that may put workers at risk for moral injury and psychological distress, as well as conditions that may protect them from it. This will help us identify what healthcare organizations can do to prevent and address moral and psychological distress among healthcare workers in the future.

Who is conducting this study?

The study is being conducted by an interdisciplinary team of researchers located at the San Francisco VA Healthcare System. The principal investigator is a sociologist and VA health services researcher named Natalie Purcell, PhD, MPA (Natalie.Purcell@va.gov).

Who is paying for this study?

The study is paid for by the National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health, part of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What will happen during the research study?

Frontline healthcare workers in inpatient settings, emergency departments, and community living centers will be invited to complete a 10-minute secure online survey about their experience at work during the COVID-19 pandemic, including impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Selected respondents who express interest will be invited to participate in a 60-minute telephone interview.

Selected VA administrators or leaders will be invited to participate in a focus group to share feedback on a draft strategy to help healthcare organizations better understand and respond to the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on VA healthcare workers.

What will you do with the study findings?

Results of this study will be used to draft recommendations (a “blueprint”) to help healthcare organizations better understand and respond to the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers. These recommendations will be shared with VAs across the country as a resource for their reference and use. Managers seeking to promote worker wellbeing may find them helpful.

Will you come to my facility to conduct this research?

No. No research team members will travel to your site to conduct research. Participation in the study happens entirely remotely—for example, through a secure online survey and/or a telephone interview.

How will you ensure participant privacy and confidentiality?

Surveys are confidential and can be completed anonymously. However, respondents can choose to share their contact information with us for a follow-up interview. We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, names and other personal information will not be used.

Who can answer my questions about the study?

Questions about this study can be directed to the Principal Investigator: Natalie.Purcell@va.gov.