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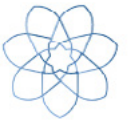
Building Mental Resilience among Healthcare Professionals during Emergencies in Dubai

About the Council

Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government took the initiative to launch the Policy Council, a round table dialogue program, to promote meaningful dialogues that will enrich shared knowledge within government entities. The Council also aims to highlight vital public topics and policies of high priority within the framework of the renown achievements realized by government entities in the UAE in various fields, positioning them locally, regionally, and globally as leaders within their specializations.

Additionally, the Council strives to encourage the dissemination of expertise, promote knowledge sharing, and ensure that all government entities benefit from the same. In this context, the School aims for participant diversity at every session, so as to include federal and local levels, central authorities, and specialized authorities, in addition to promoting the engagement of influential non-government stakeholders in relevant discussions. This will enable meaningful, comprehensive dialogues and the ability to tackle topics from a variety of perspectives, as the School seeks to restructure the Policy Council with a view to integrating it within comprehensive action agendas that will enable the Council to conduct in depth discussions of topics on the table. This, in turn, will enhance common understanding and knowledge-sharing efforts. The objectives of the Council can be summarized in providing a platform for cognitive dialogue among experts, specialists and stakeholders involved in the government sector with a view to highlighting issues of priority and importance on government and community levels. The Council also aims to document and disseminate dialogue in a balanced, comprehensive and practical manner to enrich cognitive content within government. Additionally, the Council strives to encourage individual and organizational communication and relationships, and to strengthen the cognitive network within government to enhance effective organizational cooperation. Finally, the Council strives to present insights and recommendations that will have an effective impact on joint action and the development of government performance.

Introduction

Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted the significant role of healthcare professionals in responding to emergencies and maintaining healthcare systems. In Dubai, special focus is given to recovery from the pandemic and the health of healthcare professionals is being prioritized. A Policy Brief titled "Building Mental Resilience among Healthcare Professionals during Emergencies in Dubai" was published on the 27th April 2021. The brief addressed the policy problem, its underlying factors and best available evidence on policy options to address them. Then a Policy Council Dialogue was organized with key stakeholders to gather their input on the brief findings and recommendations.

This paper presents a summary of the Policy Council Dialogue deliberations and future steps to implementing the policy elements.

The Policy Council Dialogue

The Policy Council Dialogue was held on June 17th, 2021 through a virtual meeting software. It was facilitated by Shatha Muhsineh, from Dubai Health Authority and was supported by Prof. Melodena Stephens and Dr. Immanuel Azaad Moonesar from Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government. It included four (4) policymakers and physicians from Dubai Health Authority, Health Policies and Standards Department. An earlier informal discussion was held on June 14th, 2021 with two (2) mental health researchers that work in academic institutions. This report summarizes viewpoints from both discussions.

The Policy Council Dialogue was held to facilitate a discussion of evidence-based findings from the literature on the policy issue, high-priority areas and inform policy decision-making. The dialogue had several key features, including:

- Addressing the policy issue and its significance in Dubai;
- Explaining the different underlying factors of the policy issue;
- Discussing the five elements approach to addressing the policy issue and relevant evidence;
- Assuring confidentiality and providing a safe space for sharing ideas and thoughts;

- Being informed by a pre-circulated brief on the issue that synthesized high-level evidence from both international and local research about the issue, elements and implementation considerations;
- Being informed by a discussion about the factors that aid in understanding the issue further and possible approaches to implementing the elements;
- Including key policymakers and researchers in the field;
- Utilizing visual aid to assist with the discussion; and
- Not aiming for consensus.

Participants' views, experiences, and the knowledge they shared enriched the dialogue. The dialogue intended to encourage action and put the policy issue on the policy agenda by engaging with the stakeholders who took part in the dialogue as well as sharing the summary of it with those who may review the summary and take action within their own institutions.

Deliberation about the Policy Issue

For setting the context of this policy dialog, according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community". Participants in the dialogue agreed to the increased pressure on healthcare professionals during the latest Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its subsequent effect on their physical and mental health. They stressed the importance and time-sensitivity of addressing healthcare professionals' mental health during emergencies in Dubai before they are lost to severe mental illness, burn-out, or leaving their home countries.

When discussing the prevalence of mental illness and distress in non-emergency and emergency contexts, participants agreed with the projection of increased likelihood of developing mental distress during emergencies. They also highlighted the low reporting of mental illness among the population and the stigma around seeking mental support within healthcare professionals and the community. It was discussed that the mentioned two factors mean a higher proportion of the healthcare professionals may be at risk of mental distress and illness than what is estimated in the Policy Brief.

When discussing the underlying factors of the policy issue, participants related to the limited insurance coverage to mental health services and unaffordability of some services. They also highlighted the Dubai Health Strategy (2016-2021) and its potential effect on improving mental health awareness and service utilization among the target group. The Strategy has a Mental Health Program which promotes mental health and aims to reduce stigma around it. Participants provided information and resources on the Program that can be used to further contextualize the policy elements.

Deliberations about the Policy Elements

The policy elements were presented along with the relevant literature to include: element description, the underlying factor it addresses, benefits, risks, cost and cost-effectiveness, and uncertainty around elements as cited in the examined literature.
Participants acknowledged the importance of all the elements and the challenges in implementing the elements related to insurance and destigmatizing mental help-seeking.

The policy elements were:

- Element #1: Prioritizing HCP's Mental Health
- Element #2: Expanding Insurance Coverage
- Element #3: Expanding Tele-counseling and Web-based Interventions
- Element #4: Training Community members
- Element #5: Launching Awareness and Media Campaigns

The current direction of the Dubai Health Authority to promote telehealth services further and the existence of the Standards for Telehealth Services to protect patient information and assure information security were cited as enablers to the implementation of element #3 on expanding tele-counseling web-based interventions. Future collaboration between the Frontline Heroes Office (that caters to professionals directly involved with managing emergencies) and Dubai Health Authority's Doctor for Every Citizen Telehealth Initiative was seen as an opportunity to improve access to mental health services and address the affordability gap. Since stigma around mental support exists widely among healthcare professionals, providing an anonymous support option was suggested as a mitigation method.

Participants also discussed the role of research and data in understanding current enablers and barriers to help-seeking in the community. A researcher highlighted the need for more engagement with the community and healthcare professionals to understand their needs before implementing any intervention.

Recommendations

The evidence from the literature suggests a positive impact of the elements on the mental health of healthcare professionals when adopted. The dialogue discussion created a consensus among the participants on the need for action that involves a broader range of stakeholders. The main focus of the recommendations was on improving tele-counseling access and provision.

Summary of recommendations:

1. Exploring platforms and interventions that were implemented in some private health facilities for their staff during COVID-19 surge;
2. Assessing the effectiveness of these interventions and potential to be up-scaled to Emirate level interventions;
3. Conducting focus group discussions with healthcare professionals to gauge their perspective, needs, and appropriateness of elements in addressing them;
4. Engaging with more stakeholder from the Community Development Authority, healthcare professionals, Dubai Health Insurance Corporation, and Dubai Health Authority to put the policy issue on the agenda.

Next Steps

It was agreed that further steps need to be taken to build on the discussion and its findings, and the participants offered support in disseminating the dialogue summary and policy brief within their teams. In addition, both documents will be communicated with relevant departments, institutions, and professionals to advocate for action. All relevant stakeholders, subject matter experts, and institutions in public and private sectors shall be engaged in agenda-setting, priority-setting, and implementation. Additional work is needed to set the implementation plan and evaluation process to ensure evidence is collected throughout the implementation and not only at the end-stage. Generated evidence can aid in planning the next steps.

Full report

Muhsineh, S. & Stephens, M. (2021). Building Resilience among Healthcare Professionals in Dubai. Issue no. 2. In Eds (Moonesar I.A. et al.) International Public Policy Insights, Academy of International Business Middle East North Africa Chapter & Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 27 April 2021.
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The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government

The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (formerly Dubai School of Government) is a research and teaching institution focusing on public policy in the Arab world. Established in 2005 under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, in cooperation with the Harvard Kennedy School, MBRSG aims to promote good governance through enhancing the region's capacity for effective public policy.

Toward this goal, the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government also collaborates with regional and global institutions in delivering its research and training programs. In addition, the School organizes policy forums and international conferences to facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote critical debate on public policy in the Arab world. The School is committed to the creation of knowledge, the dissemination of best practice and the training of policy makers in the Arab world. To achieve this mission, the School is developing strong capabilities to support research and teaching programs, including:

- applied research in public policy and management;
- master's degrees in public policy and public administration;
- executive education for senior officials and executives; and,
- knowledge forums for scholars and policy makers
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For more information on research at the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, please visit:
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Health Policy

The health policy research area aims to explore healthcare policy and policy for health in the UAE. It also addresses the health policy the policy implications, needs and challenges related to the provision of health services in accordance to the UAE National Agenda.

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