

# Introduction to Mental Health in Healthcare Workplaces

Ruby Brown and Anne Wojtak

In the quest by health leaders to create the conditions necessary for the delivery of safe, high-quality care, this issue of *Healthcare Quarterly (HQ)* is pleased to offer some promising approaches and resources for establishing healthy workplaces. We are all too aware that the workforce – as the backbone of the health system – is facing severe pressures. The demand for healthcare workers is outpacing supply, which necessitates innovative solutions to retain those already in the system.

In the face of an aging population grappling with complex health and social conditions, staff are confronted with mounting issues – disruptive events, inadequate resources, unmanageable workload and insufficient training and support. For staff to thrive, it is crucial for organizations to not only address these challenges but also be aware of the impact of the cultural evolution underway in society. As reflections of the communities they serve, organizations must evolve their culture accordingly. While we make progress in social justice and inclusivity, we cannot overlook the growing polarization in attitudes that threatens to divide us. Now more than ever, organizations have to be on top of what matters to the workforce and managers must lead the charge toward unity and understanding in the diverse landscape.

As noted in the previous edition of *HQ* (Brown and Wojtak 2024), there is hope and optimism on all fronts in mental health. There is better evidence now than ever on how to address the physical, psychological and social factors that

contribute to mental wellness in the workplace. Additionally, there is a newfound openness to acknowledging people's humanity at work, which was not previously recognized as the norm. It is now understood that life at work and outside of work are interconnected and affected by many different factors and forces. Positive relationships are essential for individuals to thrive during the significant portion of their lives that they spend at work. Furthermore, we now know that personal identity, values, emotions and feelings play a more significant role than mere facts in shaping people's perceptions.

Healthcare organizations are increasingly aware of the urgency to address the needs of their workforce as part of a broader strategy to promote well-being and improve patient care, to achieve the Quintuple Aim (Nundy et al. 2022) and to meet The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace as an employer's duty of care (MHCC 2013). We hope that the articles describing SE Health's experience by Virani et al. (2024) in strengthening culture, leadership and supportive environments to retain staff, along with Lowe's (2024) article on promoting psychological health and safety using the new Health Standards Organization's Global Workforce Survey, will enable organizations to stay connected with and better understand what matters to staff.

*HQ* relies on leveraging knowledge from colleagues across the country who generously take the time to share their

experiences and discoveries so that we can pass it on to others attempting to do the same, thus establishing a new baseline for further iterations and for effective practices to flourish. We encourage and greatly appreciate your contributions to *HQ*, so please keep the articles coming. We also recognize the

immense challenges you face in sustaining the health system and in finding solutions. Remember to prioritize your own well-being as you navigate this vital work; it is essential for you to remain healthy because you are just as important as those you serve. **HQ**

---

## References

Brown, R. and A. Wojtak. 2024. Introduction: Why a Special Focus on Mental Health and Substance Use? *Healthcare Quarterly* 27(2): 20–21. doi:10.12927/hcq.2024.27435.

Lowe, G. 2024. Promoting Psychological Health and Safety in Canadian Healthcare Organizations. *Healthcare Quarterly* 27(3): 22–27. doi:10.12927/hcq.2024.27490.

Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) 2013. *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace*. Retrieved November 5, 2024. <[https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2019-03/C4HC%20Toolkit\\_Asset%2036\\_ATP-HC\\_EN.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2019-03/C4HC%20Toolkit_Asset%2036_ATP-HC_EN.pdf)>.

Nundy, S., L.A. Cooper and K.S. Mate. 2022. The Quintuple Aim for Health Care Improvement: A New Imperative to Advance Health Equity. *JAMA* 327(6): 521–22. doi:10.1001/jama.2021.25181.

Virani, T., F. Ismail and J. Brooke. 2024. Beyond Traditional Practices: Innovating Workplace Mental Health in the Community. *Healthcare Quarterly* 27(3): 28–33. doi:10.12927/hcq.2024.27444.

---

## About the Authors

**Ruby Brown**, BScN, MBA, ICD.D, has served in executive roles across multiple provinces and territories. She has spearheaded projects from laying the groundwork for healthcare organizations to navigating complex negotiations between governments and driving innovative advancements in mental health. As a principal of Mandala Management Inc., she offers strategic insights and operational guidance to enhance organizational effectiveness and contributes to government-initiated assessments of healthcare systems. Ruby is based in Victoria, BC, and can be reached by e-mail at [ruby@mandalaconsulting.ca](mailto:ruby@mandalaconsulting.ca).

**Anne Wojtak**, DrPH, is a senior healthcare leader with more than 20 years of experience in the home and community care sector in Ontario. She is the co-lead for East Toronto Health Partners (Ontario Health Team), has a consulting practice focused on health system strategy and is adjunct faculty at the University of Toronto in Toronto, ON. Anne can be reached by e-mail at [annewojtak@adaptivestrategy.ca](mailto:annewojtak@adaptivestrategy.ca).