

Mental Health Initiatives for Hospital Staff Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background and Objective:

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has raised concerns about its impact on mental health in the workplace. This study aimed to assess the mental health status of staff at our hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic, review the measures implemented, and identify strategies for future mental health support.

Subjects:

Approximately 1,300 staff members working at facilities affiliated with our organization in Fukuoka city area, including two hospitals and eleven clinics, among others.

Methods and Interventions:

1. Establishment of a Healthcare Department for Staff Support:

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, a dedicated healthcare department was established to provide mental health support for staff. This department consists of occupational health professionals and members of the Occupational Health and Safety Committee, facilitating information sharing and collaboration with relevant departments.

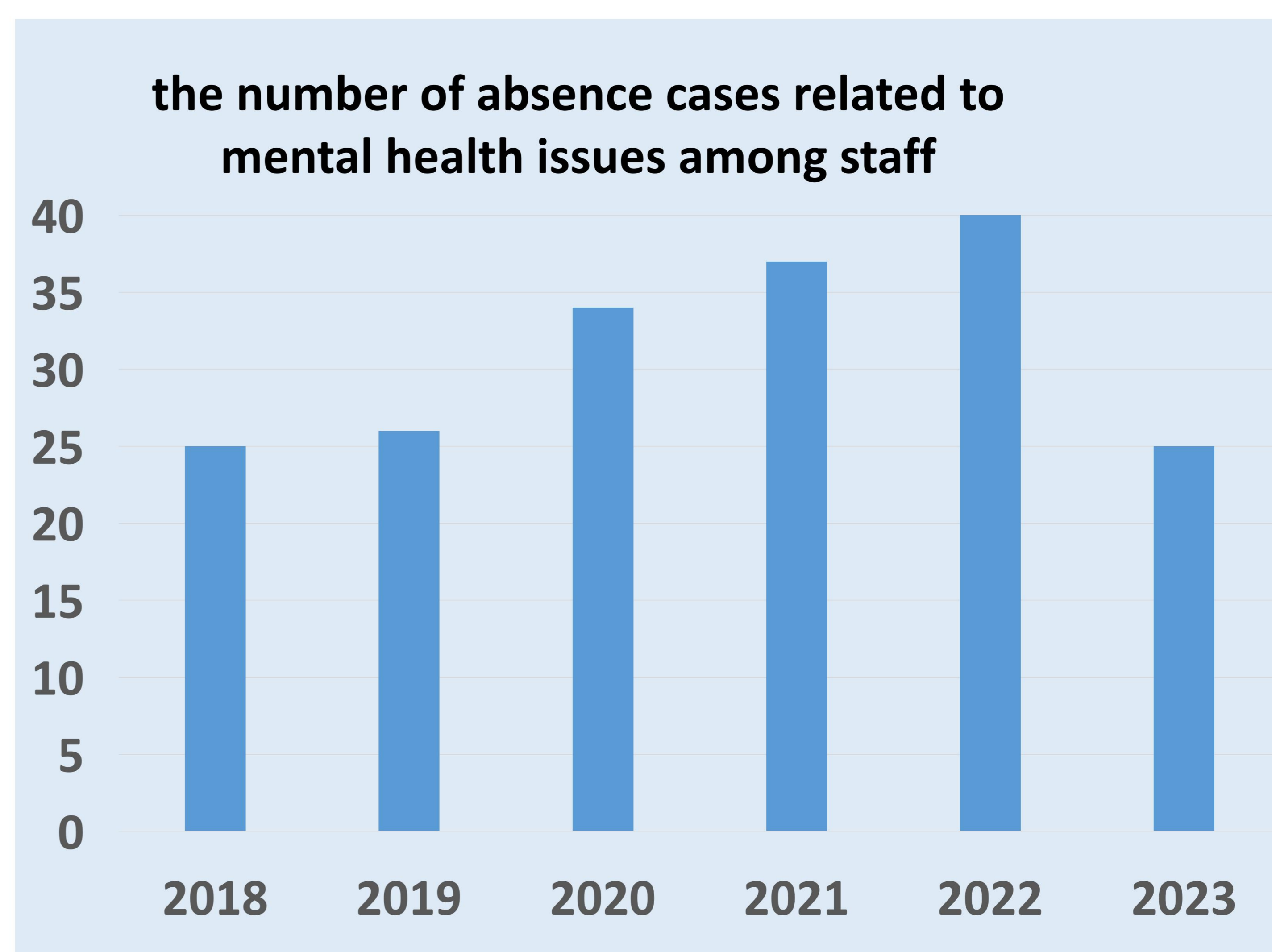
2. Main Mental Health Support Initiatives:

- Conducted outreach calls to staff who contracted COVID-19 to provide psychosocial support.
- Distributed materials on mental health and self-care to promote self-care practices among staff.
- Expanded counseling services by clinical psychologists, providing targeted support for new staff and those working in COVID-19 wards, as well as other staff members who were anticipated to experience high psychological burdens.
- Organized mental health seminars for managerial staff.

These seminars included lectures on self-care and line care in mental health. Line care refers to the support provided by supervisors and managers to their subordinate employees regarding mental health. Additionally, group discussions were held where participants could share their experiences and exchange opinions.

Results:

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of absence cases due to mental health issues at our hospital showed an increasing trend from 34 cases in 2020 to 37 cases in 2021, and 40 cases in 2022, but decreased to 25 cases in 2023. This decrease suggests that the healthcare department's initiatives and the mental health support provided to staff may have been effective.



In the mental health seminars for managerial staff, participants provided the following feedback:

“After the COVID-19 pandemic began, communication with my subordinates has decreased, so I want to make a conscious effort to reach out to them.”

“It was reassuring to learn that other managers were struggling with similar issues. I would like to have regular opportunities for exchanging opinions.”

“With the increased burden and stress due to the pandemic, I have had less capacity to care for my subordinates. I feel it is necessary to establish a system that allows for flexible support beyond the boundaries of individual departments when needed.”

Conclusions and Lessons Learned:

Mental health measures for healthcare staff during the pandemic are crucial for maintaining staff wellbeing. Promoting the importance of self-care and line care in mental health is essential. It is also important to recognize that managerial staff, who are responsible for line care, are prone to isolation and increased stress in the workplace, making their own self-care a key consideration. Establishing opportunities for communication among managerial staff can help reduce feelings of isolation, share resources for problem-solving, and build supportive relationships, which can provide many benefits for mental health care.

It is crucial to aim for a work environment where all staff can support each other and do not have to face difficulties alone.

There is no conflict of interest. Contact: tk-nakashi@fid.jp