

PACU Fitness Challenge: Promoting Health and Mental Well-Being Post-COVID-19 Surge

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Introduction: During the height of COVID-19 our PACU was converted into a 52-bedded ICU overnight. Every patient was on a ventilator, with each nurse caring for two to four intubated patients. With the city on lockdown and minimal outlets to relieve stress, my colleagues increasingly felt burnt out and dissatisfied with their physical and mental well-being. Once PACU returned to regular responsibilities, the nursing team remained stressed. There was a need to increase unit morale and reduce burn out, and leveraging exercise to promote health and mental well-being, the Fitness Challenge was born.

Identification of the Problem: Verbalized feelings of burnout and dissatisfaction with physical and mental well-being among PACU staff.

Purpose of the Study: Promote health and mental well-being, boosting morale and increasing engagement of PACU staff members.

Methods: Participants chose the type of workout; defined as 30 minutes of increased heart rate. Monthly targets (# of workouts) were set, and increased as the challenge progressed. Guiding principles: 1) Inclusivity – everyone could participate in a way that was comfortable; 2) Goals – personalized, achievable and measurable; 3) Team-based approach – to drive momentum and morale. A sticker board and a digital fitness tracker were used to log and track workouts with participants encouraging one another.

Outcome/Results: Post-implementation, the program had a positive effect on their physical and mental wellbeing. The completion rate was 64.7%, 59.7%, and 73.8% each quarter. On average, 66% of participants completed workout targets. Findings showed sustainability of this wellness program through continued staff participation. A team-based approach helped to increase motivation and accountability for exercise. These findings were endorsed through participant verbalization of improvement in physical and mental wellbeing thereby reducing burnout.

Discussion: The fitness challenge increased staff engagement in health-promoting self-care activities. Monthly success rates and encouraging comments reflected commitment, engagement and camaraderie among staff. While not all the participants met the monthly targets, they continued to show commitment to their personal fitness by consistently exercising.

Conclusion: To deliver consistent high-quality care to patients we need to ensure the health and well-being of the staff members providing care.

Implications for Perianesthesia Nurses and Future Research: A personalized team wellness program is an effective initiative to improve staff physical and mental wellbeing during high stress events.