

Module 3d

Communicating with emotional competence to recognize, manage and prevent stress

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Background for trainer

Work related stress is a main cause of problems and errors among health providers and is very common. **Emotional competence can help providers manage stress better.**

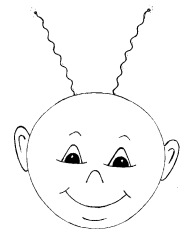
A stressed health provider is prone to listen poorly and communicating badly with patients and colleagues, as well as making work related mistakes. Stress is also a main danger signal that can lead to conflict with patients or colleagues. When people let stress rule their lives over time without recognizing and dealing with the **causes** of stress, they often burn out. Becoming aware of the danger signs and learning strategies to prevent and deal with stress can lead to better work satisfaction, fewer conflicts, and eventually more effective work and better patient centered care.



Burnout will be dealt with in the follow-up course, but the relation between stress and burnout can be made clear already when teaching this module.

Providers have many good reasons to get stressed in their work – lack of medicines and supplies is a common one.

The effects of stress can be very negative on the provider herself, her colleagues, patients and the work environment. A provider who is stressed and unaware is usually feeling vulnerable - without being able to recognize the emotion, or to deal well with it. She may (subconsciously) try to protect herself – e.g. from more work, or from close contact with people. The focus is on him/herself, and the provider will often not be able to see the patient as a person, or to build trust and establish relationship with the patient.



A provider who is feeling stressed is not likely to show appreciation to colleagues or patients. The ability to listen is reduced, and so is the ability to be present, and to reflect and think critically. A stressed provider will most likely not practice empathy (*as this requires ability to be present and really see, and to focus on the other person*). She will not be able to identify and relate to vulnerability, or to other emotions influencing the patient. She cannot see herself “from the outside” or recognize other perspectives. **The antennae of our awareness “mascot” have “gone into hiding”.**

In hierarchical situations (*e.g when both the national culture and the medical culture demand that respect is shown upwards, and that authority is not to be questioned*), stress is often caused by lower level staff not daring to say no to their supervisor, or not daring to ask questions, or hiding mistakes for fear of retributions. Communication is affected negatively, trust is lacking, and confidence is not built up. Open, constructive communication is often difficult when the provider and/or supervisor is

stressed and unaware. This again negatively affects providers' work performance, and the quality of patient centered care they are able and willing to provide.

The causes of stress and burnout are usually linked to (unrecognized) emotions. When you learn to recognize danger signals in time, identify the emotions that have been overlooked or pushed aside, and deal with them constructively, it will usually reduce stress and contribute to preventing burnout. Providers who are emotionally competent will usually be aware and able to manage their stress level. These skills make them able to recognize their own automatic reactions (e.g. to emotional challenges like an angry patient), and take a step back from such reactions. The provider will use the "mental space" (provided by stepping back from reacting automatically) to make a quick analysis – what can be the reasons behind the emotions? The reasons behind her own emotions, and behind the emotions of the other person? Understanding these – the provider can choose to act wisely, by focusing on communicating constructively to build trust and a professional relationship, and thus – address whatever problem is at hand.

During their first set of observations, participants may have become aware of how stress affects their communication, when looking at how they deal with anger and irritation. They have started to recognize how emotions affect how they communicate, and they will have reflected on how they manage their emotions. During the first days of the workshop, this awareness is strengthened. The main purpose of this module is to further strengthen this awareness; to identify, share and strengthen useful strategies they have developed and used, affirm their growth and empower them to continue learning and using each other as resources in dealing with stress, conflict and burnout. ***Emphasizing the effects of this is important – it leads to better care for patients, better relationships with colleagues and supervisors, better job satisfaction and improved wellbeing.***

Stress and burnout were added as modules in Kilifi for the third group of providers. Results from the first two training courses show that participants reported they were dealing much better with these aspects towards the end of the learning process – without stress and burnout having been taught specifically as topics: They were "side-effects" of managing the emotions better. This showed the course team (*and was confirmed by the participants*) that becoming aware of and learning to handle emotions constructively is the main "ingredient" that helps them deal better with stress and burnout. We decided to make these aspects clearer by making separate modules for both workshops, using the emotional competence skills as a basis.

We saw that it was especially important to identify and separate between the **external causes** of stress (like lack of medicines and equipment, low salary, long working hours, patients who do not speak their language, etc), which participants usually cannot do anything about, and the **internal causes** (their own reactions to the situation) – which they CAN control, influence and change when using emotional competence skills. Focusing on the internal causes and how to deal with these had an empowering effect.

The appreciative feedback providers received was a main "ingredient" in making them cope better with stress. When managing the emotions (e.g. by stepping back from automatic reactions), providers are able to communicate in a more constructive way. By communicating well, and experiencing good response to this from the patient (*e.g. a sincere and appreciative "thank you" for meeting her with respect and openness*), this "emotional input" will help reduce the provider's stress level, and help bring her "back on track" to relate well to the people around her.

Thus, throughout the modules in both workshops, the emotional aspects need to continue to be focused on, and also linked to the module on conflict. Using appreciation consciously and frequently is an especially important practice to emphasize: ***Being appreciated simply make people feel better.***

NB – there are of course a number of aspects related to a stressful working situations which cannot be “fixed” by managing the emotions better. However, most of our participants have noted that their stress has become significantly easier to cope with after they started becoming aware of what they COULD do something about, and becoming able to recognize and manage their emotions competently.

There are 4 sections in this module. An overview:

1. **Introducing the topic and the objectives, and acknowledge learning** (slides 1-4)
2. **Common effects of stress on communication, experiences with handling stress** (slides 5-8)
3. **Causes of stress – internal and external factors** (slides 9-11)
4. **Strategies to prevent stress and take care of emotions** (slides 12-18)

Further background about purpose and contents of the sections

1. Introducing the topic and the objectives, and acknowledge learning

The purpose of the introduction is to explore briefly how stress affects providers and their work, and that it is important to become more aware of how to recognize and deal with this problem, to be able to provide good patient centered care. The link between stress and management of emotions should be emphasized from the very beginning: Trainer can acknowledge participants’ learning and growth in handling emotions competently, and explore the connection between these emerging skills, and stress: Have they experienced a change after they became more aware of how they communicate, and how they recognize and manage emotions?

Providers will acknowledge that stress is a very important challenge to good patient centered care and to job satisfaction. The feedback from the observation tasks will presumably show examples of how they have managed their emotions – which should be acknowledged and appreciated: Using emotional competence to manage emotions well is a set of very important skills to prevent and handle stress. It is useful to get out one or two examples from them in plenary during the introductory slides and reflect on these experiences together – before letting them share experiences in the groups – as the observation tasks do not ask them specifically to observe stress, and the effects of stress on communication.

2. How stress affects communication, and experiences with stress

Effects of stress on how you communicate are here discussed, and the link to emotions should be emphasized. Participants share experiences of how being stressed influences the interaction with patients, colleagues and supervisors, with special attention to how it influences the way they communicate.

Participants are then invited to share experiences and “best practices” in handling stressful situations, identify which skills they use to recognize and handle stress well, and to identify learning needs to be able to handle stress better. In the plenary discussion and reflection, trainers ask briefly about effects of these new practices on patients, colleagues and providers themselves, and strengthen awareness of the link to the emotions.

3. Causes of stress – external and internal factors

When investigating the causes of stress, it is important to separate between the **external factors** – many of which providers often cannot do anything **directly** about (like lack of medicines and equipment, low salary, long working hours, patients who do not speak their language, etc), and the **internal factors** (their own reactions to the situation), which they **can** control, influence and change –

when they are aware of how it “works”. To be able to separate these and take responsibility for improving their own situation will often have an empowering effect on the participants. There are many causes of stress – and giving examples of these from participants’ own observations will help strengthening the awareness of how many aspects of life can lead to stress.

The early warning signs are emphasized, to further help them to recognize when stress is “on the way”. Consequences of stress on providers’ own health, and on patient care, should be highlighted.

4. Strategies to prevent stress and take care of emotions

The purpose here is to let participants share experiences of useful strategies they have found to prevent stress, including seeing the early warning signs, and taking action before it is too late – by being more aware of and taking better care of their own emotions, using the emotional competence skills. By also focusing on the positive effects of lowering the amounts of stress, the motivation to prevent stress early will be strengthened.





By summarizing the steps to recognize and handle emotions with awareness and competence, and linking this to handling stress, participants will add another useful tool to their toolbox: Trainer should explore and emphasize the need to take active responsibility for changing the way they deal with stress – rather than waiting for others to take action. This becomes an easier task when participants are familiar with the tools.






Time needed: 2 -3 hours







Materials needed: Flipchart, marker pens, tape to put up flipcharts on the wall.






Facilitator/co-facilitator roles: This presentation is best done by an experienced trainer, by her/himself. Other trainers function as assistants, rather than “co-facilitators” (*see definition*).





Presentation slides: Comments, questions, main points to bring out

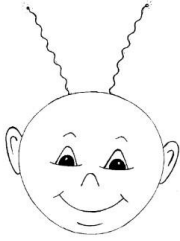



<p>Communicating with awareness and emotional competence to recognize, handle and prevent stress</p>   <p>By Ane Haaland Phelomena Munga Gladys Etemesi Hellen Rachilo, Lennox Baya Mwanamvua Boga</p> 	<p>Introduce the module in your own way, e.g Ask: How is stress affecting your work? Can you give use examples from your observations? Get out some main points: Stress makes you listen poorly; communicate badly; It can affect patient care negatively Stressed providers often make medical mistakes Does not see patient as a person Cannot be present Difficult to practice empathy, and respect Antennae “gone into hiding” Stress can reduce job satisfaction If not dealt with, it can lead to burnout</p> <p>Ask: What is the connection between stress, and emotions? Main point: Emotions which are not recognized and managed well, can lead to stress. Emotional competence is a set of very important skills to prevent and handle stress. Acknowledge their learning and growth in dealing with emotions, link this to stress.</p>
<p>Referencing and acknowledging the iCARE-Haaland model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please feel free to use and adapt the material in this presentation, and the model it is built on, by referring to the model, and the authors • This presentation is adapted from «Communicating with awareness and emotional competence to recognize, handle and prevent stress», which is part of the learning materials in the iCARE-Haaland model. • To reference this content please use the following : Haaland A, with Boga M, 2020. Communicating with awareness and emotional competence: introducing the iCARE-Haaland model for health professionals across cultures. With contributions from training teams, Vicki Marsh and Sassy Molyneux. https://connect.tghn.org/training/icarahaaland-model/ • The authors' names should remain on the presentation, with a by line recognizing the person who (has adapted and) is presenting the presentation 	<p>Please reference the materials you use from this module and the presentation in the way specified on the slide.</p>
<p>Introduction: Stress can cause problems</p> 	<p>Link their example(s), to stress and management of emotions Refer to research results – about the effects of stress on providers' life and work Ask if they recognize these points as being true for themselves, in their work place</p>

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;">  <div style="text-align: center;"> <h2>Objectives</h2> </div>  </div> <p>To strengthen awareness on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How emotions can lead to stress and conflict • How stressful situations can lead to mistakes (mis -diagnosis, mis -treatment, mis -management) • How stress can affect providers' wellbeing • What are external and internal causes of stress <p>To strengthen skills to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and acknowledge emotions • Use emotional competence (EC); take a step back • Communicate with awareness to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – deal with the problem – manage stress, using EC – (and prevent conflicts and burnout) 	<p>Read out the objectives</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">How do you communicate with patients and colleagues when you are stressed?</p> <p>Discuss in small groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some effects (on patients, colleagues and yourself) of you being stressed? • How does stress influence the interaction and communication with patients, colleagues and supervisors?  	<p>Exercise no. 1</p> <p>Ask participants to discuss in groups Get suggestions from the groups</p> <p>Main points to bring out:</p> <p><i>What a stressed person does:</i></p> <p>Focuses on self Sees mainly own side and points; is often not constructive. Quick to judge, without awareness or stepping back. Quick to react automatically, without considering the other person Communicates in a hurried and superficial way Infects others with his/her stress</p> <p><i>What a stressed person does not do:</i></p> <p>Use awareness and have perspectives: Listen well; or have ability to be present Build trust and relationship See the patient as a person See or respond to patients' or colleagues' emotions Be aware of your own emotions, and how they influence others Be able to concentrate Show appreciation for others Show empathy Reflect, or think critically</p> <p><i>Antennae have "gone into hiding"</i></p> <p><i>Ask: What can be effect on person centered care?</i> Get some suggestions, and discuss</p>

<p>What can stress lead to? <i>Some possible effects on the provider</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demoralization/feeling low; frustration • Insomnia and not being able to think rationally, can lead to poor work output and making mistakes • Not listening well, misunderstanding • Not seeing patient as a person • Not practicing respect; not empathizing • Insecurity • Depression • Anger and agitation • “Space out” or withdraw; freeze up • Our blood pressure rises, our heart pumps faster • Our muscles constrict; get muscle pains  <p><i>What is common to most of these reactions?</i></p>	<p>Read out the slide, link to/build on the suggestions from participants Ask: What is common to most of these reactions? Get suggestions</p> <p>Main points: These are almost all emotional reactions: Stress affects our emotions, strongly Awareness, stepping back from automatic reactions, and management of emotions are key skills to manage and reduce stress</p>
<p>Positive effects of short term stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term stress can also have positive effect – when handled with awareness • Stress is originally a protective response – to help us survive: We decide if we should “fight or flight” – i.e. stress can protect us from danger by activating bodily defenses • Some research shows positive effects of short term stress on the immune system: stress can prepare the organism to deal with challenges • Stress can help productivity and be stimulating, and protect against boredom and under-involvement • Physical exercise is stressful– and is positive for (most of) us • Positive stress can lead to growth • The ability to take on stress consciously can improve with learning • Positive stress is known as EUSTRESS <p>The key:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the signs of stress, and • Handle it with awareness and EC 	<p>Stress is not only negative Ask – before showing the slide (or hide the points) – can stress also have positive effects? How?</p> <p>Emphasize that the key to manage stress in a conscious way is to learn to recognize the signs, and handle it with awareness and emotional competence.</p>
<p>How do you handle stressful situations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share experiences of how you handle stressful situations as a provider <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reflect on what you have become aware of during observations – Discuss strategies you use to handle stress • What do you need to learn, to handle stress better?  	<p>Exercise no. 2 Ask them to share experiences of what it is that they do to handle stress constructively Ask them to link this to what they have observed about their communication habits, especially related to emotions Get feedback, highlight good strategies: Ask assistant facilitator to note these on flipchart Ask them to identify what they need to learn, to handle stress better. Write on flipchart, hang on wall for reference</p>
<p>What causes stress?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External factors (outside you, belonging to system) • Internal factors (inside you/emotions)  	<p>Ask them to buzz for one minute: What are some External factors causing stress? What are internal factors?</p> <p>Main points: External: No medicines, system problems, cultural expectations from women and men Internal: Insecurity, inability to say no, emotional exhaustion/overwhelmed</p> <p><i>Note: The purpose here is just to clarify what the concepts “External” and “Internal” refer to</i></p>

<p style="text-align: center;">What causes stress?</p> <p><i>From the experiences you shared in groups – discuss:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were external factors (outside you/system) causing stress? • What were internal factors (inside you/emotional)? • Which ones can you influence – How?  	<p>Exercise no. 3</p> <p>Ask them to link the external and internal factors to their experience, discuss in groups</p> <p>Make a flipchart, get feedback, discuss – see description at end of slides</p> <p>Main points:</p> <p>Internal factors - you can influence them, and deal with them.</p> <p>With many of the external ones, you cannot influence them.</p> <p>When people do not separate these – dealing with the stress can seem just too much.</p> <p>The points are put together in a “soup”, and you do not see what is what.</p> <p>Separating them is empowering – it is like the Serenity prayer: God/higher power, give me strength to do what I can do, to leave what I cannot do, and – the wisdom to know the difference.</p> <p>When you know the difference, and know what you can take action on, you are more likely to handle things differently. This is empowering.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Examples: Causes of stress</p> <p>External factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of equipment and resources • Workload/alone at work  <p>Internal factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear (of being blamed by patients (“I am not able to help her”); of patient condition worsening; of being seen as lazy or incompetent by colleagues, and/or supervisors, etc) • Blaming and criticism; sarcastic/not living up to expectations • Being shouted at/disrespected • Not knowing what to do, and why • Gloomy facial outlooks by patients or colleagues • Handling challenging clients (difficult) 	<p>Sum up more causes of stress, relate to the discussion above.</p> <p>Ask for reflections on how to deal with these causes (<i>unless all are dealt with above, then skip to questions below</i>)</p> <p>Ask: How important is stress in your work situation?</p> <p>What are some of the effects of stress?</p> <p>What can stress lead to?</p> <p>Get suggestions, move to next slide.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">How to prevent stress:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Discovering early warning signs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgetfulness • Poor concentration • Not listening to others • Disorganized • Inability to set priorities • Losing overview • Doing many things without finishing them • Irritable, jittery – snapping at colleagues • Get annoyed easily • Insomnia  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily/unexplained fatigue; just tired • Wake up tired • Body pain - unexplained 	<p>Read out the warning signs</p> <p>Ask if they recognize these</p> <p>Ask: What can you do to take action, when you experience these signs?</p> <p>Get some suggestions</p> <p>Let them buzz if needed</p>

<p>What strategies can you use to prevent stress?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share strategies of preventing stress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – what you do already? – what more can you do? • What effect would this have on you – if you have less stress? • Effect on handling colleagues, and patients? 	<p>Exercise no. 4</p> <p>Ask: What strategies do you use to prevent stress? Ask them to discuss in groups. Get suggestions. Main points to bring out: Recognize warning signals – look for the emotions: Decide how to take care (over time). Immediate action: take a break Take time for yourself – reflect on the situation – is there something you can do? Take a “step forward” and talk, take initiative to solve the problem before it blows out of proportion Make a clear workplan; Set priorities; Delegate. When you share with people you trust (rather than just swallowing), burden of stress can be reduced Awareness and stepping back, using emotional competence, are main skills</p>
<p>Useful strategies to prevent stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Recognize the situation: identify emotions, and danger signals – Identify and deal with the cause(s) of stress – Acknowledge the situation as it is • Use EC: Take a step back - Choose the right time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiate with your boss • Apologize? • Share the issue with a colleague • Take a rest/break  <p>Buzz:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of these strategies take care of your emotions? How ? • How can you strengthen skills to take care of emotions? 	<p>Read out examples from their observations Ask them to buzz on last points</p> <p>Main points: All of these strategies are related to emotions, and help you take care of them When you have less stress, you can relate better to patients and colleagues, improve team work and become more productive. You provide better patient centered care by being a better listener, communicating in a clear way, build trust and establish relationship with the patient, show empathy, be present..... etc!</p>
<p>Taking care of emotions – preventing or dealing with stress</p> <p>At work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share with people you trust: burden of stress reduces • Take a (tea?)break – breathe! • Do something physical – walk? • Share a joke, Smile • Cry  <p>At home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to music, sing; read a book • Look at photos with family – link to good moments • Do something physical – swim, dance, walk, run • Prepare a good meal, enjoy good smells • Other methods/strategies? 	<p>Read out the strategies to take care of emotions to prevent or deal with stress Ask if anyone has an example If no examples come spontaneously, let them share at their tables for 2 minutes, then get examples</p> <p>Note: Many participants will not be used to thinking about taking care of their own emotions – it takes time to create this awareness. To facilitate – trainers can also share their own strategies of taking care of emotions, to show their role as role models.</p>

<p>Preventing stress from building up: Practising emotional competence</p> <p>Step 1: Recognize: ➤ Recognize your own emotions – use EC: Are you overworked? Feeling stressed, in general? If so</p> <p>Step 2: Acknowledge ➤ Get antenna out. Decide to be aware – use tools!</p> <p>Step 3: Step back ➤ When meeting patients or colleagues- stop automatic reactions, try to be fully present</p> <p>Step 4: Listen with ears, eyes and heart: ➤ If patient is upset, or scared– deal with emotions first. Set your own stress aside <i>for now</i> ➤ When the patient trusts you, the quality in the communication can soothe your stress <i>for now</i></p> <p>Step 5: Take care of your needs: Find cause of stress</p> 	<p>Summarize: The main aim is to become aware and recognize what is happening, and then take appropriate action.</p> <p>When you become aware you have a choice: You can take action to make yourself, or the patient (or both), feel less unsure. Such action will have a positive effect on the interaction and will reduce stress.</p>
<p>YOU have to change the way YOU handle the causes of stress yourself!</p> <p><i>If you expect the people from the outside to change you get nowhere!</i></p>  <p>Look at internal factors for stress – and ACT!</p>	<p>Emphasize a key point: Responsibility for taking action to reduce stress, is with the participants.</p> <p>No one else can do this job FOR them: Stress is related to emotions, and they need to take care of their own emotions (<i>which can be to recognize their emotions and set them aside, for now</i>) – before they can deal constructively with e.g. patients’ emotions.</p> <p>Ask if they agree on this point</p>
<p>In summary – dealing with stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize emotions and take a step back Reflect – get clarity  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a step forward – to solve the problem – with awareness 	<p>Sum up by this simple message –</p> <p>Emphasize the need to Recognize and Step Back from emotions, using emotional competence When you do, you get “space” to reflect – and can see clearly: Get clarity</p> <p>Then - Step forward – with awareness You will see how to solve the problem</p>

Exercises

1. How do you communicate when stressed?

Purpose: To strengthen awareness of potential effects of providers' stress, on their interaction with patients, colleagues and supervisors. Furthermore, to strengthen motivation and skills to use awareness and "stepping back" as main skills to prevent automatic reactions to stress. Finally, to realize that stress is infective, and that not handling it will often cause problems for themselves, and others, and can lead to medical mistakes and reduced patient centered care of care.

Procedure:

- **Ask** participants to discuss questions on the slide, in groups
- **Get** suggestions from the groups, write on flipcharts: One – title: "What stressed persons do/how they act", the second: "What stressed persons do not do". You can ask two participants to write – one on each flipchart: This makes the reporting and sorting more active.
- **Ask: What can be effect on person centered care, when a person is stressed?**
- **Get** some suggestions, and discuss (NOTE: there might already be suggestion on this point during the first discussion – if so, add a third flipchart with title "Effects on patients/colleagues", and let a third participant take notes on this.
- **Reflect together on the importance of being aware of how stress influences communication.**

Main points to bring out:

What a stressed person does:

- Focuses on self
- Sees mainly own side and points; is often not constructive.
- Quick to judge, without awareness or stepping back.
- Quick to react automatically, without considering the other person
- Communicates in a hurried and superficial way
- Infects others with his/her stress

What a stressed person does not do:

- Use awareness and have perspectives:
- Listen well; or have ability to be present
- Build trust and relationship
- See the patient as a person
- See or respond to patients' or colleagues' emotions
- Be aware of your own emotions, and how they influence others
- Be able to concentrate
- Show appreciation for others
- Show empathy
- Reflect, or think critically

In summary: Antennae have "gone into hiding"

2. How do you handle stressful situations?

Purpose: To strengthen awareness of how stress operates in providers' lives, and how stress influences communication with patients, colleagues and supervisors. Furthermore, to strengthen awareness of strategies they use to handle stress, by sharing experiences about what works well. Finally, to identify learning needs.

Procedure: Instructions on slide.

3. What causes stress?

Purpose: To strengthen awareness about which causes of stress are external/outside you and can thus usually not be directly influenced or changed by the provider, and which causes are internal/inside you, and can thus be influenced through using awareness, communication skills and management of emotions. Furthermore, to strengthen motivation and skills to look for the reasons behind stress, and strengthen awareness about the likely effect of understanding such reasons: Empowerment to act, and reduction of the stress.

Procedure:

- Remind them of the discussion they just had in the groups (slide 4), and ask them to explore and identify **reasons** for the stress in the different experiences and situations they shared.
- Ask a co-facilitator to divide a flipchart in 2, and write the headlines “External factors/reasons” at the top, and “Internal factors/reasons” in the middle. On the side – write a heading: Influenced by...
- Ask for feedback from the groups, and sort these as you write (into external, and internal)
- Ask which of these factors they can influence, and how. Circle the factors with different colors – the external, with blue, and the internal with red – indicating “Action”.
- Ask how they can use this knowledge (or clarity), to deal more consciously with stress.
- Ask for insights and reflections from doing this exercise.

Example of flipchart

What causes stress?	
External factors	Influenced by stress?
Lack of equipment	No?
Workload/alone at work	No
Duty allocation	
Cultural expectations from women and men	
Internal factors	Influenced
Fear - being blamed by patient: “I am not of help to them”	Yes
Dealing with supervisors who are responsible – fear of dealing	Yes
Fear of being seen as lazy by colleagues and supervisors	Yes
Feeling incompetent because of sickness (e.g. feeling overwhelmed)	Yes
Inability to say no to supervisor, resulting in emotional exhaustion/overwhelmed	Yes
Insecurity to talk about sickness (e.g. feeling burnt out)	Yes
Fear of condition worsening because of workload	Yes

Main points to bring out:

- **External factors** or reasons for/causes of stress are usually resource- and/or management related: Lack of equipment, lack of medicines, workload. Participants cannot usually influence these factors – they are just “there” (*although some participants say: With good communication skills, you can influence management to take action to solve some of the problems*)
- **Internal factors** or reasons/causes of stress are usually related to emotions: Fear and insecurity are the most common. The realization that these points are influenced by stress, and that the participants can take charge and change how they deal with these factors - is the key point of the exercise.
- Participants can influence most of the internal factors, mostly by being aware, and using communication skills
- Realizing that by identifying what it is you **can** influence, and separate it from what you **cannot** influence, can make you free to take action more effectively. It **empowers** you.

- Participants can discover (realize?) that they can take action, when the task is doable
- They can realize that you can reduce the task from “a mountain you cannot climb” (tackling/dealing with external plus internal factors, in a “soup”), to “a hill you can climb” (tackling internal factors, with awareness and communication skills)
- Learning to recognize and acknowledge emotions, and taking a step back (e.g. from fear) is a key skill.

Separating the internal from the external factors is empowering – it is like the Serenity prayer: *God, give me strength to do what I can do, to leave what I cannot do, and – the wisdom to know the difference.* When you know the difference, and know what you can take action on, you are more likely to handle things differently.

4. Strategies to prevent stress

Purpose: To strengthen awareness of useful strategies to prevent stress, by sharing experiences and bringing together the discussion from the whole module. Furthermore, to strengthen awareness of the potential benefits of handling stress constructively, on themselves, patients, colleagues, supervisors, and ultimately – on quality of care.

Procedure and main points: See instructions on slide