

COVID-19: Why compassionate leadership matters in a crisis

Summary of a longer article by Suzie Bailey and Michael West for The King's Fund:
<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2020/03/covid-19-crisis-compassionate-leadership>

- COVID-19 is a grave global crisis, and no country has the resources to deal with the crisis in the way they would wish. All health care systems have to find creative ways to innovate, spread knowledge and collaborate.
- This means that those who lead health and care services need to put compassion at the heart of their leadership practice. And for the NHS, this crisis represents an opportunity for us to collectively improve our leadership culture.
- Compassionate leadership - including self-compassion - is one of the most potent ways people can deal with what feels frightening and overwhelming, and leaders need to focus compassion on all those who provide services, whatever their role or grade.
- In turn, this means meeting the core needs of staff, ensuring their wellbeing and sustaining their motivation. It means finding the balance between managing an emergency response, which may need command and control, and working with the uncertainties inherent with COVID-19, which requires flexibility, drawing on all available resources, utilising collective intelligence and adapting solutions as situations change.
- NHS staff are highly skilled and motivated, and they can all be leaders if the right conditions exist for them to unleash their collective wisdom and do what they know to be the right thing. Enabling this requires compassionate leadership: paying attention to staff, truly listening to them and being present with them.
- It means taking time to understand the challenges people face, rather than seeking to impose understanding; empathising with them, feeling their anxieties; and always coming back to the question: *'how can I help you?'* - the most important task of leadership.
- And always come back to the core 'ABC' of leadership:
 - Autonomy and control: staff must have voice and influence
 - Belonging: feeling supported and part of a multi-disciplinary team
 - Competence: making workloads manageable.
- By working compassionately, courageously and honestly, leaders can support and care for their staff so that they can save thousands of lives across our communities.