The pandemic has completely changed the health care world, and staff were scrambling to keep up and adapt. Our colleagues providing and supporting patient care on the ground were faced with PPE shortages, overflowing emergency departments, scarce ICU beds and fears of ventilator shortages. Others were struggling to adjust to virtual work, homeschooling...
their children and living under the shadow of pay cuts, furloughs and layoffs. The short- and long-term effects of the crisis on the overall well-being of health care personnel quickly rose to the forefront as ministries looked for ways to care for caregivers — body, mind and spirit.

To start, CHA reached out to our members and asked if they would be willing to share what they were doing to address caregiver well-being in their organizations. The response was amazing! My email was flooded with messages from leaders throughout Catholic health care, outlining the efforts being organized to address moral distress, compassion fatigue and burnout. We were stunned at the many creative, generous and compassionate steps being taken around the ministry to support our associates.

A new focus area on well-being was created on the CHA website where you can find many resources shared by our members, as well as a wealth of external tools and resources from around the country. This focus area arose in the midst of the COVID crisis, but it is not limited to this period; we hope our members will find it valuable beyond the current situation.

CHA then hosted a four-part webinar series on well-being, inviting three of our members to share in greater detail their efforts to meet the needs of their staff — physically, mentally and spiritually. SSM Health, Providence St. Joseph Health and SCL Health agreed to participate and generously shared their experience, challenges and resources with more than 500 health care professionals who logged on for the sessions. The fourth webinar was a presentation from CredibleMind, highlighting the mental health impact of the COVID crisis and providing evidence-based methods to address the well-being of caregivers along every level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. I would encourage you to visit their website at crediblemind.com. You’ll find a multitude of evidence-based literature, tools and resources there for every aspect of whole person care.

We know the very real toll COVID-19 is taking on health care providers and other essential workers. In early July, the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center counted more than 10.5 million confirmed cases worldwide and more than 500,000 deaths around the globe. Sadly, the United States has seen a significant surge in cases, particularly in the South and West. Health care leaders continue to express great concern about the spread of the virus as we go through the summer and into the fall. We must all remain vigilant as it becomes clear that the crisis shows few signs of diminishment.

Moving forward, I will facilitate a new CHA task force that will focus on associate and caregiver well-being. While the group’s work will undoubtedly focus on the pandemic, we anticipate that the conversation will expand to address other major issues such as socioeconomic health disparities, social determinants of health and the impact of systemic racial injustices, among others.

Whatever the signs of the times may be, I am confident of one thing: our Catholic health care ministry will rise to meet the challenge. We were literally born for this. Most of our ministries were founded in the midst of epidemics, wars and social injustices. The brave religious women and men who founded Catholic health care have left us a proud heritage designed and equipped to meet the current COVID crisis and whatever is yet to come. Our light has always shone brightest in the darkness, which is both the legacy we inherited and the one we hope to pass along to those who come after us.

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