



Mediclinic Newcastle finds an emotional vaccine to Stay Strong

Having navigated two waves of COVID-19 and preparing for a possible third, South Africa's healthcare workers are dealing with ongoing mental stress, physical exhaustion, separation from families, and the pain of losing patients and colleagues.

The need

To manage these high levels of burnout, hospitals are searching for ways to strengthen their people's emotional wellbeing. For [Mediclinic Newcastle](#), Free To Grow's [Staying Strong](#) programme showed great potential to meet this need.

"We are thrilled that vaccines are being given to all healthcare workers. But what is being done for healthcare workers who underwent severe trauma due to the death of patients they cared for? This is where Staying Strong comes in: a powerful 'emotional vaccine' that provides staff with tools to be resilient and strong when the next wave comes around," says Japie Greyling, Hospital General Manager at Mediclinic Newcastle.



Japie Greyling,
General Manager of
Mediclinic Newcastle

A DIY approach

The Staying Strong video-based Toolkit provides 15 bite-sized modules focusing on different aspects of emotional and mental wellbeing. The

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messages are shared with teams in weekly 10-minute leader-led sessions, spanning over four months. Every session creates a wellbeing touchpoint that grows coping skills and connects people more deeply with their leaders and colleagues.

Colleen Schoeman, HR Manager at the hospital sees the content of the toolkit as key. “This is where the magic lies,” she says, describing Staying Strong as a “life-giving gift to employees.” She explains that the practical and relatable nature of the material immediately resonated with the Newcastle team. They saw the simple, yet powerful video messages being relevant across employee levels, creating a common language regarding wellbeing across the hospital.



Colleen Schoeman,
HR Manager of
Mediclinic Newcastle

Implementing a programme of this kind is not without its challenges, particularly in a hospital setting where employees and managers are primarily focused on patient care and time for team meetings is a luxury. Mediclinic Newcastle and Free To Grow, therefore, adapted the tools and implementation process to meet the hospital’s unique needs.

Significant impact

Seven weeks into implementation Colleen smiles when she recalls how some already-overburdened leaders ‘moaned and groaned’ when she shared with them the expectation that they would lead these conversations, following a simple step-by-step Leaders guide.

“These same leaders now tell me how they enjoy facilitating the conversations and how much value their teams derive from it. They are really delighted by the results they are getting. I am impressed to see how committed some leaders are to the process. One, for example, made a little gadget for each of her team members to remind them of the key message in one of the conversations and another was willing to drive 30 kilometers to work while on leave to ensure her team does not miss their weekly session,” Colleen says.



Mariaan Olivier, Unit Manager of the General Ward and 35 nurses, is another example of a leader who is embracing Staying Strong and making it her own. Mariaan creates posters, props and displays to reinforce the key messages from the videos to keep them on top of mind.

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Mariaan explains, “This excellent program makes it possible for me to motivate my team. My effort might not change the current situation for all my team members, but even if it just gives one staff member the tools to conquer a hectic day – then it is worth it.”

Japie and Colleen are leading by example by using the Toolkit themselves.

Colleen reports that the Staying Strong conversations with her team create a deeper awareness of the challenges individual team members are facing, allowing them to support each other more. Japie agrees:

“I get much from these conversations. I have the honour of sharing it with my Personal Assistant and Patient Experience Manager. We have good conversations and share meaningfully (lekker). FANTASTIC! Love it, puts a spring (huppel) in my step for the week.”

Japie explains that an important decision was who to use as facilitators of the toolkit conversations and sees this as key to the success of the roll out. “We even have some of our cleaning staff acting as facilitators to their peers.”

Mediclinic Newcastle is experiencing the benefits they hoped for, with staff responding positively to the programme. Colleen is hearing more and more people using the Staying Strong talk in the corridors. “People are clearly taking it to heart and remembering the messages. It is definitely working and having the impact we desire,” she says.

“We see daily benefits of this wonderful programme. We can see people growing stronger in mind, body and soul. Yes, there are some units that have fallen slightly behind, but as a whole, there is a different vibe in the hospital. Staff are more optimistic and resilient when you speak to them. This is the best 15 week workout we have ever been on. Apart from the PPE that should be adequately worn, Staying Strong has become another essential weapon in the arsenal of our staff,” Japie concludes.