

# Beyond Pizza, Doughnuts, and Burnout - A Collaborative Statewide Stress First Aid Training Initiative

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Healthcare personnel, particularly nurses, experience significant occupational risks within the work environment. Nurses often experience prolonged stress exposure, causing substantial consequences, including reduced job satisfaction, diminished work efficiency, and increased risk of burnout. These stressors impact nurses' well-being, and ability to work, including threat to physical and psychological health. For nurses, the COVID-19 pandemic presented widespread challenges, highlighting the importance of stress management knowledge and skills. This immense impact of ongoing stress on nurses is recognized by the North Carolina Nursing Association and its Council of Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurses (Psych Council). With this understanding, we offer support and help.

The NCNA Board of Directors voiced concern about the ongoing high-stress levels and burnout nurses are experiencing and is supporting a year-long campaign by the Psych Council to host four Stress First Aid (SFA) training sessions across North Carolina. SFA is a framework for peer support and self-care for health care professionals.

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The SFA framework parallels how a health care worker approaches physical first aid—intervening to remove the stressor, prevent further harm, and promote recovery for those strongly affected by significant stress. It is a flexible, multi-step, evidence-informed framework of knowledge and skills to address individual and community-based stress risks, providing practical preclinical actions to reduce stress-related risks and responses to psychological damages.

Nurses who experience more severe or long-term stress reactions are at risk of becoming ill and often unlikely to seek help. Evidence supports the benefit of peer support and effective early traumatic stress management for nurses.

Dr. Sean Convoy, DNP, PMHNP-BC, has received a HRSA grant to present this SFA curriculum and train as many nurses as possible across NC. The Psych Council hosted the first in-person SFA Training July 22nd at UNC's Western Carolina University campus. This was free for nurses and healthcare workers (including 4 hours of continuing education) and was a tremendous success, with 45 participants attending.



Sean Convoy with several of the attendees of the first Stress First Aid training event in July.

Initial feedback provided insight into the value of this essential training with a resonating theme around the concept of renewed hope. The SFA training provided informative and empowering messages to identify stress reactions in self and others, reduce the risk of stress injury, and promote coping and resilience among individuals and groups in social, occupational, and academic settings.

The Psych Council's goal is for future trainers to arise from the initial training and move towards tier 2 training with sustained and continued dissemination of SFA. We plan to continue championing this critical work and foster further hope to promote health and well-being of nurses throughout North Carolina in months and years to come. Be on the lookout for details for our next SFA training in the coming months.

For more information or references, email Angie Trombley at [aktrombley76@gmail.com](mailto:aktrombley76@gmail.com).

*Are you interested in joining the Psych Council? We would love to have you! NCNA members are welcome to join any council they wish. To change your council status, simply update your Member Profile at [www.ncnurses.org](http://www.ncnurses.org) or email [LaurenZahn@ncnurses.org](mailto:LaurenZahn@ncnurses.org).*

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the view of the North Carolina Nurses Association or its board of directors. ■