

Basics of Mental and Behavioral Health Care After Environmental Exposures



RedHillRegistry.org

Red Hill community members have specifically requested more resources for mental, behavioral, and neurological health.

Healthcare professionals play a pivotal role in preventing and addressing adverse health outcomes following an environmental crisis. We **thank you** for your support of the Red Hill community and invite you to consider the community's requests for care described in this fact sheet.

As with most environmental exposure scenarios, **Red Hill community members reported experiencing trauma as a result of the Red Hill water crisis. This trauma can profoundly affect both physical and mental health [1].**

Physically, it may lead to symptoms that may affect nearly every body system, including chronic pain, gastrointestinal issues, and cardiovascular problems [2]. Mentally, individuals might experience a multitude of symptoms related to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [3]. These effects can disrupt daily life, relationships, and overall well-being. Recognizing and addressing the impact of trauma is crucial for effective healing and recovery [4]. As a health professional, helping address patients' mental health needs is vital, whether as a primary care provider, specialist, or as a mental and behavioral health professional.







Role as Healthcare Providers Supporting Mental Health:

- Supporting residents by listening, providing information, recording concerns, and addressing stigma.
- Engaging with local experts and reliable resources to be better equipped to help patients.
- Ensuring you practice self-care to maintain your own well-being as a health professional.
- Assisting patients with the steps to find a mental health professional, if this is a new experience for them to navigate.
- Providing evidence-based, trauma-informed mental health care or referring to specialists that do, for treatments such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Emotional Freedom Technique, Low Energy Neurofeedback System (LENS), Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR), or other highly structured modalities.
- Encouraging those who experienced the Red Hill water crisis to [join the Red Hill Registry](#).

Mental Health & Insurance

High out-of-pocket costs often deter patients from seeking mental health care. When making referrals, please consider patients' insurance coverages, which vary by company and plan. Supporting patients in navigating their benefits can help maximize coverage and reduce costs.

Immediate Help Lines:

-   **Hawai'i CARES 24/7:** 988
-  **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
-   **Veterans Crisis Line:** 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)
-  **SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline:** 1-800-985-5990

Recommendations Informed by Community Focus Groups and Surveys:

Listen and Chart

Practice exposure-informed care--the comprehensive care approach where the patients' toxic exposure and its health impact are always kept in mind [3]. Patients want to know that you are taking their concerns seriously. Show them that you are listening and paying attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues. Documenting these concerns and any history of toxic exposure helps providers understand patients' perspectives, address their concerns effectively, and ensure they feel heard and understood to support future care [2]. Toxic exposure symptoms often resemble those of other common conditions; thus, accurate records of symptoms and exposures are essential for proper diagnosis and treatment [3,4].

Acknowledge Uncertainty

Be upfront about what you know and do not know about potential health risks following an environmental exposure. Acknowledge that your patient's worries are valid and that dealing with such uncertainty is challenging. Let them know you do not have all the answers, but that you are here to help and will work to get answers for them. Recognize that this may involve becoming more educated on how to take an exposure history or consulting emerging literature on the effects of jet fuel exposure [2].

Social Support

People often isolate themselves when in a stress response, such as after an environmental crisis, or may turn to addictive behaviors to avoid feeling distress. Prompt the patient to reach out to trusted friends or family members for additional support and to prioritize their mental health in daily life [1]. Encourage patients to use other available mental health resources, including in-person or online support groups, taking a walk in nature, hugging a loved one or pet, or trying Polyvagal Exercises for Safety and Connection [3,5]. The goal is to help patients feel safe to be in their bodies and then in relationships with others, while they are coming back to taking control of their own lives again.

Physical Symptoms

Physical and mental health are intertwined, where the condition of one directly influences the other, creating a loop that can either improve or deteriorate your patient's well-being [2]. Trauma, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from environmental exposure can lead to physical symptoms and negatively impact overall health, potentially slowing recovery of the whole person [1,4].

Take an Exposure History as Part of Whole Person Health

The exposure history is a record of the times the patient has come into contact with the material or place. The CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has guidance on how to take an exposure history. Because of the nature of the Red Hill Fuel Spill, paying attention to patients' past residential, work, and even school location history can inform their future healthcare. Whether as a primary care provider, psychologist, social worker, a psychiatrist, or other health professional, it is important to look at the full picture of the patient's health [1].

Taking an Exposure History



Stay up to date on Related Scientific Literature

Angry, Scared, and Unsure:
Mental Health Consequences of
Contaminated Water in Flint, Michigan



Social Determinants of Mental
Health: Physical Environment

Taking care of your
psychological health when
your water supply is contaminated.



Environmental Toxins and Brain:
Life on Earth is in Danger

Contact Information

Email: info@redhillregistry.org **Website:** RedHillRegistry.org **Social Media:** @RedHillRegistry



Reference:

[1] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2025, March 26). *The impact of disaster events on mental health*.

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/disaster_events/for_providers/mental_health_impact.asp#:~:text=Those%20affected%20by%20disaster%20events,adjustment%20disorder%2C%20and%20complicated%20grief

[2] Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). (n.d.) *Community stress resource center*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved October 25, 2025, from <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/community-stress-resource-center/index.html>

[3] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (October 22, 2025). *Exposure informed care for health care providers*. <https://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/WARRELATEDILLNESS/EIC/Providers.asp>

[4] U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2025, April 16). *Jet fuels and petroleum exposure*. https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/petroleum/jet_fuels.asp

[5] Dana, D. (2020) *Polyvagal exercises for safety and connection: 50 client-centered practices*. W. W. Norton & Company.