
- Trauma Relief for Healthcare Workers -
Respite, Renewal, and Support for HCPs battling COVID-19

OVERVIEW:

Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are experiencing significant trauma with the risk of ongoing psychosocial distress. In response, First Descents (FD) is offering adventure-based trauma support programs for healthcare workers on the frontlines of the pandemic. Aptly titled HERO RECHARGE ([more info](#)), these trauma-informed programs are designed to improve psychosocial health, nurture supportive peer relationships, process grief and loss, and better position healthcare workers to carry out their important work.

Since the launch of HERO RECHARGE on April 28, 2020, First Descents has received more than 10,150 inquiries from healthcare workers and first responders across all 50 states.

BACKGROUND:

As a global leader in adventure-based healing, First Descents is uniquely positioned to mobilize and support healthcare workers impacted by this crisis. With over 20 years of experience and established relationships with more than 450 hospitals nationwide, FD can rapidly identify and prioritize healthcare workers most in need of trauma relief and support.

Evidence-based research demonstrates FD's impact and clinically-significant improvements in psychosocial health ([more info](#)). Beginning in 2021, First Descents will collaborate with researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to research the effectiveness of HERO RECHARGE.

NEED & SIGNIFICANCE:

Doctors, nurses, first responders, and essential workers are on the front lines of the most devastating health crisis of our lifetime. They are experiencing death and dying in unprecedented numbers for what will likely be a sustained time period. Their proximity to disease related trauma increases the likelihood of secondary traumatic stress and exposes providers to greater risk of anxiety, depression, isolation, role strain, and burnout. The uncertainty of COVID-19 compounds the existing, high-stress nature of healthcare work, leaving these workers especially vulnerable now, and in the future.

A [new study](#) from the Journal of the American Medical Association found that the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on healthcare employees in China. This group is experiencing symptoms of distress (71.5%), depression (50.4%), anxiety (44.6%) and insomnia (34%), and female healthcare workers were among those particularly prone to problems, the study found.

Left unaddressed and without effective opportunities for respite and renewal, the healthcare system may face long term disruption. Simply put, we must care for those who care for all others.

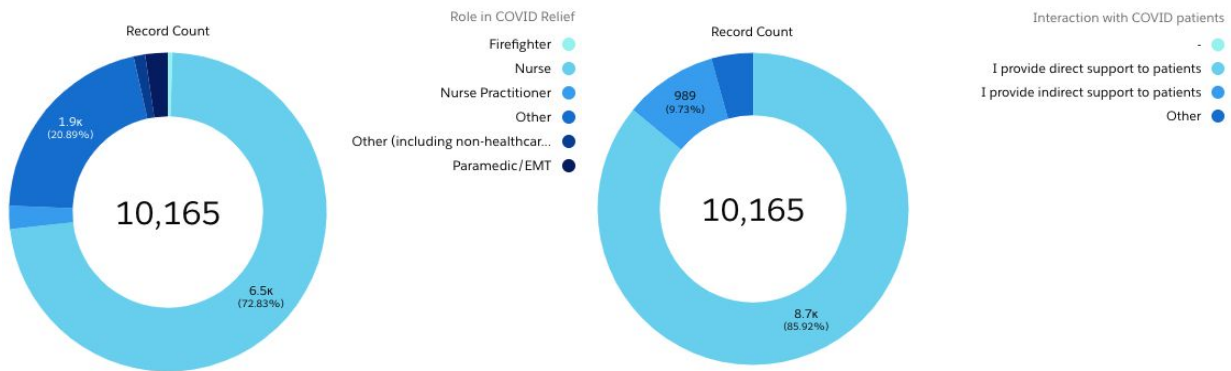
- MISSION -

First Descents provides life-changing outdoor adventure programs for young adults impacted by cancer and other serious health conditions

PROGRAM DESIGN:

First Descents is working directly with new and existing hospital partners to create custom multi-day programs for nurses, doctors, social workers, first responders, and critical infrastructure staff. All HERO RECHARGE programs have been intentionally designed with guidance from mental health professionals to debrief and process grief, anxiety, and loss.

FD has hired an infectious disease specialist, to advise on comprehensive safety protocols and a robust communicable disease plan ([more info](#)). Their directives inform deliberate risk mitigation with special precaution against COVID-19 transmission and community exposure. These protocols include regional vaccine monitoring, pre-program and on-site health screenings, mandatory mask compliance, social distancing guidelines, increased cleaning practices, and single-occupancy lodging accommodations.



IMPLEMENTATION:

First Descents has initiated a phased implementation plan to focus on regions declared suitable for in-person programs by the organization’s infectious disease specialist and communicable disease plan. To date, 2021 program locations include southern California, Oregon, Colorado, Wisconsin, New York, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. Of note, First Descents will enroll participants through a regional approach, thereby welcoming healthcare workers from nearby geographies to attend scheduled programs. Programs will begin later this year following the widespread rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine.

First Descents delivered 13 programs serving 178 healthcare workers in 2020 ([more info](#)). Of note, 71% of participants reported that their stress and anxiety decreased as a result of the program, 92% reported feeling more connected to the healthcare community, and 99% indicated that they would recommend First Descents to a fellow healthcare worker.

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RESEARCH & EVALUATION:

Beginning in 2021, First Descents will collaborate with researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to research the effectiveness of HERO RECHARGE. The study will measure FD's impact on specific phenomena affecting health care workers and first responders, including stress, burnout, resilience, and well-being.

IMPACT:

The economic and psychosocial implications of the current health crisis are far reaching and undeniable. New and innovative solutions must foster collaboration between medical providers and community-led organizations to address socio-economic inequities in patient care and ease the financial burden on an under-resourced healthcare system.

HERO RECHARGE will **improve provider health outcomes, strengthen healthcare system vitality, and support local economies**, to achieve Triple Aim impact. Beyond the benefits to participant health and healthcare system vitality, HERO RECHARGE will also route much-needed business to local economies, particularly to businesses working in travel and hospitality.

SUPPORT & COSTS:

First Descents has received more than 10,150 inquiries from healthcare workers and first responders across all 50 states. To meet growing participant demand, FD aims to secure a minimum of \$2.5M in new revenue to expand programming and serve a critical mass of frontline workers.

FD will administer between 20 to 30 programs serving an estimated 250 healthcare workers in 2021. First Descents will scale beyond these planned programs as more funding is secured. Suffice to say, the need is great.

HEALTHCARE WORKER TESTIMONIAL:

First Descents has received thousands of testimonials from frontline workers and first responders. Their selfless service strengthens our resolve to provide respite and renewal in beautiful wild places.

"During this crisis, my wife and I have been working for FEMA. We left our jobs in Florida to work on the frontline in New York City. We have worked 29 of the past 33 days as registered nurses to deliver exceptional patient care at the bedside on units considered "hot zones." The suffering and devastation that we have seen here in New York has been haunting. It is something that will be with us forever. I believe a First Descents experience would allow us to decompress with peers who have experienced similar situations and find some kind of peace." – Registered Nurse, NYC

"This program was one of the greatest experiences of my life. For the first time in a long time, I feel happy, alive, and that I've been given a fresh start. I am rejuvenated and motivated to keep fighting to save lives" - 2020 New York Hero Recharge Participant, ICU Nurse, NYU Langone Health

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FUTURE PROGRAMMING:

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated a tremendous negligence within our Nation’s healthcare system: the lack of mental and behavioral health services available to healthcare workers and first responders. This significant gap in care leaves these workers especially vulnerable now, and in the future. While HERO RECHARGE has been designed to address the immediate community needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, First Descents’ Board of Directors have approved these program offerings to remain a long term service of the organization.

ABOUT: [First Descents](#) (FD) is the global leader in adventure-based healing. Through outdoor adventure and community building, FD improves the health and quality of life for young adults impacted by cancer and other serious health conditions. Beginning in 2020, FD expanded programming to serve healthcare workers on the frontlines of COVID-19.

RESOURCES: Program Impact ([link](#))
CNN Heroes: Hero Recharge ([link](#))
NEJM: *Preventing a Parallel Pandemic* ([link](#))
The Atlantic: *No One Is Listening to Us; Third Surge Breaking Healthcare Workers* ([link](#))
New York Times: *PTSD and Burnout Threaten Medical Workers* ([link](#))

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