



Information letter to seafarers in the Persian Gulf

Dr. Jon Magnus Haga

Head of Norwegian Centre for Maritime and Diving Medicine
Haukeland University Hospital. Norway

To all seafarers currently serving aboard ships in the Persian Gulf – facing uncertainty due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and ongoing military operations – we extend our sincere compassion during this difficult time and offer our deepest respect and gratitude for your service to global trade and to the maritime industry.

The situation is demanding, but you are not alone. Many are thinking of you and your families, hoping for improved conditions and for your safe return home to your loved ones.

Medical advice is always available to seafarers. Telemedical Maritime Assistance Services (TMAS), such as Radio Medico Norway, operate 24/7. The doctor on call can be reached at any time – day or night – by voice, text, or video through your onboard medical officer. This service is free of charge and available to all seafarers, regardless of nationality or vessel flag.

Stress reactions are normal

In situations like the one you are currently experiencing, it is completely normal to react with stress. Your mind and body are responding to uncertainty and potential threat.

Stress can present in different ways from person to person. You might notice trouble sleeping, feeling on edge or easily startled, racing thoughts, irritability, or difficulty concentrating. Some people feel emotionally numb, while others may feel overwhelmed or anxious. Physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, or a tight chest can also occur. These reactions do not mean something is wrong with you—they are natural responses to stress.

You may also notice changes in your colleagues. People might withdraw from social interaction, become restless or agitated, be more irritable than usual, or have difficulty carrying out routine tasks.

How to build resilience to prevent stress reactions?

You cannot completely prevent stress reactions – especially in difficult or unpredictable situations – but you can reduce their intensity and help your body cope more effectively. Start with the basics: sleep, food, and hydration. Even small disruptions can make stress reactions stronger, so try to maintain regular routines as much as possible, even in an unstable environment.

Maintain your professional routines. Focus on what you can control in the moment. Breaking tasks into small, manageable steps can reduce feelings of overwhelm.

Stay connected with others. Talking to someone you trust, even briefly, can help regulate stress, while isolation often makes it worse. Where possible, limit overexposure to stressors such as constant news, rumours, or high-tension conversations, and allow your mind short breaks.

Normalize your reactions. Understanding that stress responses are natural can prevent you from becoming stressed about the stress itself.

How to support a colleague in distress?

Helping someone through acute stress is about helping them feel safe, grounded, and supported in the moment. Start by being calm and present. Listen without interrupting or trying to solve everything.

Keep things practical and simple. If they are overwhelmed, break tasks into small steps or help them focus on just the next thing. Where possible, reduce additional stressors such as noise, crowding, or too much information.

It is also important to normalize what they are feeling. Let them know that reactions like anxiety, confusion, or physical tension are common in stressful situations. Avoid telling them to “calm down” or dismissing their experience.

How to lead through uncertainty?

In times of uncertainty and stress, a captain or senior officer must focus as much on people as on operations. Stress reactions can quickly affect judgment, communication and safety.

Be visibly calm, clear and consistent. The crew will take cues from you. If you remain steady and focused, it helps regulate their stress. Give simple, direct instructions and avoid overloading people with information. In high-stress situations, attention and memory are reduced, so clarity and repetition are essential.

Acknowledge the situation. Saying something like, “This is a difficult situation, but we are handling it step by step,” helps normalize reactions while reinforcing a sense of control.

Stay attentive to your crew. Watch for signs of overload such as confusion, withdrawal, or agitation, and adjust expectations when needed. Normalize stress reactions and allow space for people to talk about what they are experiencing.

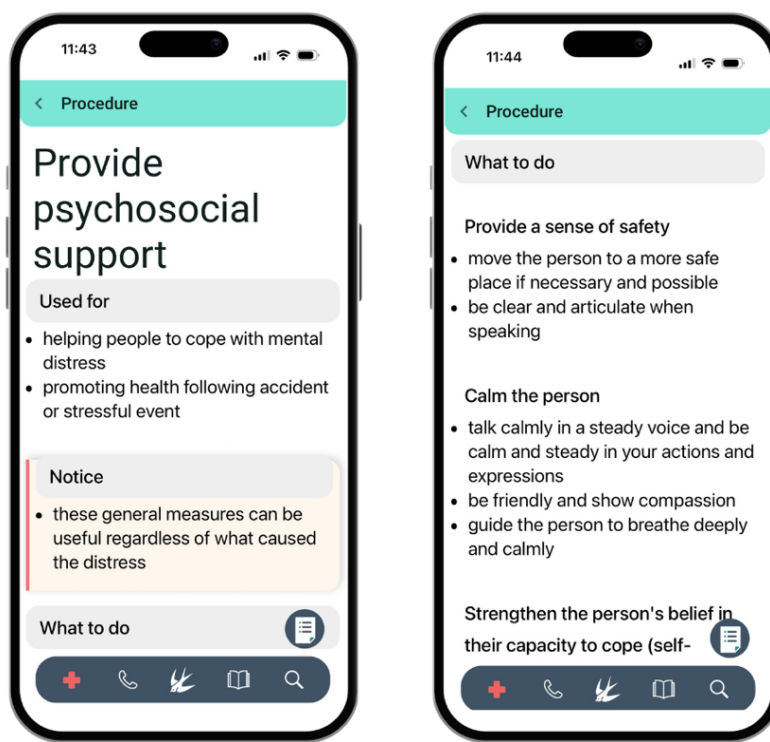
In addition, organizing shared activities on board outside of work may provide valuable social support and serve as a positive distraction.

Good leadership during and after a crisis does not remove stress, but it helps keep the crew functioning, connected and safer under pressure.

What can the shipping company do?

Daily updates can help reduce uncertainty and prevent misinformation. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that those affected are able to maintain regular contact with family, relatives and the outside world.

As the situation resolves and seafarers return home, their psychosocial needs should be followed up proactively, with access to appropriate support services facilitated as needed.



In the Mariners Medico Guide you find up-to-date, fast access and easy-to-use medical guidance.

Mariners Medico Guide

Mariners Medico Guide is a free, digital guide for all seafarers, with detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to manage a wide range of diseases and injuries at sea. The guide includes a comprehensive section on mental health. Please feel free to download the guide via your app store and read more about how to provide psychological support.

Where to contact for further support?

Social support services

Reach out to appropriate services according to company policy guidelines. Charity organisations like ISWAN, Sailors Society and Mission to Seafarers also have support available to all.

Medical advice – always available – accessed through the medical officer on board

Radio Medico Norway

- +47 51 68 36 01
- advice@radiomedico.no

Other TMAS services

Mariners Medico Guide (MMG) – free medical guide for all seafarers

- www.medicoguide.com



Download your app today

It can save lives and support you when you need it most



For more information visit www.medicoguide.com