

Mental well-being during COVID-19 pandemic: *crucial for all*

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Introduction

In January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of a new corona virus disease, COVID-19 to be public health Emergency of International concern and by March 2020 it had progressed rapidly across several continents to be a pandemic. Once COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic the U.K. Government put in place strict measures to limit spread by enforcing social distancing, travel restrictions and complete lockdown. Corona virus disease has not even spared a Prince and our Prime Minister, but they are lucky to have survived.

At the time of writing this article the number of confirmed COVID positive cases in U.S have crossed 1 million mark. In U.K. official estimates of confirmed COVID-19 positive cases have reached 161,000 and the number of deaths has exceeded 26,000 in hospitals and in care homes.

As a result of closure of all businesses, education facilities, sports and entertainment venues, restaurants and pubs has meant that day to day life in U.K. has come to a standstill. It is likely that socio-economic impact of this pandemic on health will unfold gradually over the next few months. Like with any disease, the physical health symptoms can be obvious to the sufferer as well as observer. However, psychological symptoms are less so and may take a longer time to unfold. Unlike physical illnesses, mental health problems have multi-factorial origins and usually involve an interplay between biological, psychological and social factors. In disasters such as COVID-19 pandemic all the factors may come into play at the same time.

Anxiety v Mental wellbeing in response to COVID-19 crisis

In fast moving modern life obsessed with perfectionism we took so many aspects of living for granted. Who would have thought at the beginning of 2020 that one day all of sudden we would not be able to travel to work, meet family and friends, go out shopping or on holidays as usual. COVID-19 has made us worry about our life and that of our loved ones. Due to the rapid spread of corona virus disease across the globe and rising number of deaths it has



enabled us to put life in perspective. In these unprecedented times it would not be unusual to think of our own mortality. However, the protracted nature of lockdown has generated anxiety in general public about one's future. Anxiety and worry about our own health can be exacerbated by constantly watching media footage describing the number of deaths and millions who have become ill following spread of coronavirus. Anxiety is skyrocketing and severe restrictions on our liberty, difficulty in earning our livelihood, is negatively influencing on common man's morale affecting mental stability. So the need to look after ones mental health and mental wellbeing is at an all-time high.

In mid-March 2020, a significant majority of NHS and non-NHS staff were advised to work from home as far as possible. At the same time other frontline NHS staff including medical and nursing colleagues, allied health professionals are putting tremendous efforts in saving lives of those who are COVID-19 positive and require hospitalisation

and admission to intensive care facilities.

Lockdown and Mental health: A double edge sword

One aspect of daily life which keeps us sane is a structured day. A structured day is also recommended by Royal College of Psychiatrists to promote mental well-being. In lockdown can easily become confinement. It may not always be possible as the usual structured work routine and this can give rise to developing unhealthy habits such as excessive use of gaming/online gambling, consumption of alcohol overeating, lack of exercise etc. Spending more time with family may reopen old family disputes. Financial constraints are also likely to exacerbate these problems. It is of concern that there are increasing reports of domestic violence in certain communities. A recent article in U.K. media reported 25% surge in those calling helpline for perpetrators of domestic abuse who wanted to change their behaviour. The Home Office campaign under twitter hashtag #YouAreNotAlone will encourage public support this initiative.

So, managing one's own mental health in lockdown is also equally important. I think on the other hand lockdown offers a wonderful opportunity to reflect on ones' life priorities which one would not have the time to dwell on in a busy rat-race. It offers opportunity to "enjoy the moment", appreciate positive role of near and dear ones, re-establish contact with friends and family through social media, develop new hobbies and interests. I have heard people using the opportunity of lockdown to take up short courses, reading books, learning a new language and involving in arts which they would not have done so now. Other mental well-being strategies such as meditation, exercise and walk are also likely to have positive influence on the mind and body.

Hope and Kindness:

In crisis it is not unusual for general public to look up to leadership for emotional support. HM Queen Elizabeth II did exactly that a

few weeks back by addressing the nation. Her Majesty, who has witnessed several natural and man-made disasters over the years was able to give that much needed hope that "better days will return; we will be with our friends again; we will meet again".

The second example is that of 100-year-old captain Tom Moore, from Bedford. Captain Moore, who turns 100 years on Thursday served in WWII in India and Burma walking 100 lengths of his back garden (25 meters) with his Zimmer frame to raise money for NHS. He certainly played a huge role in raising funds and morale of NHS as well as giving everyone hope for future.

Disasters offer a unique opportunity to unite people, develop better understanding in communities. I found this saying placed on a wall at place of work which I found interesting "Remember each person is fighting his own battle unknown to you so be kind to others". Its so true it is so important for us all to be kind and compassionate towards our fellow human beings.

We have to be mindful that not everyone is lucky to have a good social support system, those who are already unwell may find the current environment more stressful. NHS frontline staff particularly those working in intensive care units, acute medical wards and are treating patients with corona virus are doing a sterling job but will also need additional support for their own mental wellbeing. I am hopeful that large mental health organisations are able to step up to the challenge to promote mental wellbeing in general population. I think with a positive mindset we will be able to overcome the psychological challenges thrown at us by COVID-19. □

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Whole Health begins with
Mental Health

It makes sense that you are worried about
COVID-19.

A lot is happening quickly in relation to COVID-19.
It's normal to feel worried and overwhelmed.