

# Managing your psychological wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak

## Managing everyday life

In uncertain situations such as during a pandemic, our sense of 'threat' is heightened, which results in increased anxiety and the activation of our 'fight or flight' response. Whilst this is natural and understandable, in a pandemic situation increased anxiety is not usually helpful for us. The following advice is designed to help you to manage in the current situation:

- DO: Try to stick to your usual routine as much as possible while following national guidance
- DO: Focus on what you can control including:
  - Washing your hands
  - Keeping your hands away from your face
  - Following national advice, and any specific advice given to you by health care professionals
- DON'T: Focus on what you cannot control including when or how you or others might be exposed to the virus
- DO: Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage as this is likely to increase your anxiety and sense of threat
- DO: Stay connected with family and friends through calls, texts and social media
- DO: Take time for rest and relaxation each day
- DO: Remember that remaining calm can help us to make more reasoned and informed decisions for ourselves and our families
- DO: Remember the importance of compassion and community in difficult situations. Managing our own anxiety can help us to balance our own needs with the needs of others. For example, taking the time to 'check in' with others and not buying more than we need

## During Self-Isolation

If you need to self-isolate, the following can help you to manage your mental health needs:

- DO: Keep yourself busy with any household tasks and games, books and movies. Some people find it helpful to come up with a 'timetable' or 'schedule' of activities to break up the time. For example, this might involve spending the morning doing household tasks such as cleaning, spending the afternoon going for a walk in the garden and spending the evening relaxing and watching a film
- DO: If it is within your physical limitations try and keep physically active whilst following social distancing guidelines for example, by going for a walk, run or jog outside
- DO: Stay connected with family and friends through calls, texts and social media

## Managing work demands

Caring for patients in pandemic situations can be very pressured and distressing. The following advice is designed to help you to manage the impact of this on your own wellbeing:

- DO: Focus on what you can control including:
  - Doing your job to the best of your ability
  - Treating patients with compassion and respect
  - Washing your hands / using hand gel
  - Wearing PPE as advised
  - Following Trust procedures and instruction from managers
  - Seeking your manager's support and advice on any specific concerns you have related to your own personal situation
- DO: Remember that there are many aspects of this situation that clinical and non-clinical staff cannot control, including who is affected, the capacity and resources available to us, whether patients survive, and the impact on patients' families.
- DO: Remember that it is normal to feel a range of feelings when we are exposed to these kinds of situations. It is common for staff to experience feelings such as shock, numbness, sadness, fear, anger and feelings of helplessness. Allow yourself to feel these feelings because they are normal, natural and understandable in the situation. If possible talk about how you are feeling with someone you trust.

- DO: Talk to your colleagues about any difficult feelings. Often colleagues are the best source of support in these situations, and they are likely to be experiencing similar feelings. Sharing these feelings can help you to support one another. However, it is also important to remember that everyone copes differently and that some colleagues may not want to share how they are feeling, in which case this should be respected.
- DO: Take time for rest and relaxation outside of work. You may find that it takes longer to wind down than usual after your shift, which is understandable.
- DO: Use 'Apps' such as Insight Timer, Calm, and Headspace which offer high quality guided relaxation exercises and mindfulness meditations. There is good evidence that these can be useful in reducing anxiety. Practise these daily if possible.
- DO: Maintain your usual activities outside of work, as much as possible. You may need to adapt your activities for example, doing an online exercise class rather than going to the gym.
- DO: Avoid drinking more alcohol than usual as this can be detrimental to our mental health.
- DO: Remember that this situation is unusual and will eventually resolve. In the meantime, it is important to look after ourselves using the strategies described above.

### **When to seek additional help**

Over the course of this situation, most staff members will cope well with the support of their manager and colleagues. However there are circumstances when further help is required. In these cases you should seek a referral to Health, Work and Wellbeing through your manager. Consider this if:

- You feel unable to manage your anxiety
- You can find no relief from feelings of tension, emptiness or exhaustion
- If you have no one at work or at home who you can talk to about how you are feeling
- If you find yourself prone to accidents or mistakes
- If you find your smoking, eating and drinking habits change for the worse
- If it has been more than a month and you are concerned about the symptoms you are experiencing