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Mental Health

DEALING WITH MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This document is divided into 4 parts:

- 1. Mental health and COVID-19; stressors related to isolation and quarantine
- 2. Attitudes to have to provide support to patients and contacts

3. Recommendations for maintaining good mental health (for COVID-19 positive people, suspected cases and their contacts), with checklist

4. Dealing with domestic violence

Context

General population

The coronavirus has dragged the world into uncertainty (impact, duration and evolution of the pandemic) and the new changes with the pandemic can be difficult to live, confronting us with the unknown, often associated with a loss of control and a feeling of helplessness.

All of this has implications on mental health, especially for people who already have underlying conditions including but not limited to obsessive-compulsive disorder and anxiety. Fear and anxiety about an illness can cause strong emotions, in adults as well as in children. To note that anxiety can on the other hand have a useful function in prompting us to comply with protective measures.

It is important to remember that all the specific reactions to stressful situations can vary considerably from one person to another.

The various stressors linked to isolation and quarantine are:

- Worry about the unknown over an indeterminate period of time
- Frustration and boredom with loss of usual routines (professional and personal activities, shopping, physical activity...) as well as reduction of social and physical contacts
- Worry about insufficient resources: food, medicines, protective masks, hospital capacity
- Information: overload, contradictory, rumors
- Fear of infecting others
- Fear of the disease (with the appearance of physical symptoms which could be linked to the disease even if minor, can generate reactions of fear and concern for one's health.)
- Financial worries: loss of income, medical costs
- Stigma
- Not being able to do normal work or parenting during isolation / quarantine could also lead to guilt

Helping attitude

Professionals in ambulatory care centers

- Keep up to date with the pandemic
- Listen to people, inform them, correct rumors
- Anticipate and normalize stress reactions: normal reactions in an abnormal situation (being more worried, nervous, irritable) and offer to monitor their development
- Explore with the person what their usual resources are
- Identify the signs of advanced stress: fear, insomnia, avoidance, interpersonal problems, concentration problems, alcohol abuse

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- Communicate clearly, repeat information, in easily understandable language, the person's preferred language and in a culturally appropriate manner (see checklist)
- Can refer the person if necessary for specialized support (psychologist / psychiatrist, have a list of local resources and volunteers available)
- Engage in regular briefing / debriefing with their colleagues; 1x / day ideally, at least once a week

Recommendations

- Keep links with loved ones by phone, social media and have important and emergency phone numbers available (e.g. primary care physician, pharmacy, people to notify in case of emergency, etc.). Communication with others, sharing and listening, maintaining relationships with friends and families are important for staying connected and resilient. The readily available list of important phone numbers is reassuring in times of uncertainty.
- Confirm that basic needs are covered: food, medicine: identify a person who can do the shopping, take out the dog etc. and know who to contact (Cf. Social support, identify local resources available)
- Limit your exposure to the media and choose reliable sources of information. Recommended sources are the sites of local and national public health authorities (in Switzerland, the FOPH: Federal Office of Public Health) as well as the WHO (World Health Organization) Information Coronavirus / COVid19; put keywords on silent on Twitter, or unsubscribe from different accounts; put Whatsapp on silent
- Learn to manage uncertainty "For example, refrain from texting a friend immediately the next time you search for an answer to a question. By strengthening tolerance for uncertainty, one can reduce one's propensity to consult the internet to keep abreast of developments. "
- Reduce boredom and isolation:
 - Keep a routine (get up at a fixed time, meal, get dressed ...)
 - Cover basic needs: food, sleep, physical activity, music, reading, cooking, relaxation techniques, games, online yoga, meditation
 - Make a to-do list of things you don't usually have time to do

Date	Keep ties	Basic needs	Media exposure	Managing uncertainty	Managing boredom, isolation

Checklist

RESSOURCES AT HAND

The ambulatory care center keeps an updated list of all local mental health resources available with a mapping according to specificities and needs.

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IN CASE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

*Red flags

-Previous history of violence -Increase in acts of violence (frequency, intensity) -Death threats, fears of the victim for their life or safety

-Presence of weapon, history of violence using a weapon

-Potentially lethal physical lesions (ex: strangulation, throwing dangerous objects, blows to the head ...) rape, forced sequestration

-Several risk factors (alcohol-drugs, deterioration of psychiatric condition, pregnancy, announcement of separation, significant promiscuity, major financial difficulties, etc.)

- Direct harm to children

-Violence acted by the victim (escalation of violence)

- Suicidal thoughts observed by the victim, the perpetrator or the children

