MENTAL WELLBEING
DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

HEALTH SYSTEMS TRUST

As the country prepares to battle the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak through government-enforced lockdowns, transportation bans and strict social distancing, South Africans are urged to not only guard their physical health, but to also look after their mental wellbeing during this time.

During this time, it is common for people to feel fear, anxiety and stress. There is much we can learn from other nations who have experienced similar large-scale responses to the pandemic. A recent survey conducted by the Chinese Psychology Society on 18 000 Chinese citizens found that 42.6% reported anxiety associated with the coronavirus, 16.6% tested positive for moderate to severe depression and 21.5% showed clear signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). [1,2]

Typical responses to the pandemic and lockdown may include[3]:

- Anxiety about falling ill and dying
- Feelings of powerlessness, boredom, loneliness and depression due to being isolated
- Fear of loss of income, not being able to work during isolation, and of being retrenched from work
- Feeling powerless in protecting loved ones and fear of losing loved ones because of the virus
- Caregivers may feel increasingly worried for their children being at home without appropriate care and support
- Fear of being socially excluded/placed in quarantine because of being associated with the disease
- Avoiding approaching health facilities due to fear of becoming infected while in care

As South Africans prepare for their 21-day lockdown period, be aware of some of the main symptoms of stress during this time: (a) fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones, (b) changes in sleep or eating patterns, (c) difficulty concentrating, (d) worsening of chronic health problems, and (e) increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs[4].

Some **good mental** health practices to keep doing during the lockdown include[5]:

- Maintaining a daily routine as much as possible
- Serving others
- Practicing gratitude
- Maintaining social connectivity
- Meditating or breathing
- Spending time outdoors, if possible
- Incorporating an at-home exercise schedule into your daily plans
- Acknowledging that this is a time during which you may feel additional stress and anxiety and that this is normal.

It is important to remember that everyone responds differently to stressful situations. Firstly, recognise and acknowledge your emotions, stay socially connected (through video-calling, whatsapp etc), be patient with yourself and others, and take care of your body and mental wellbeing.

Secondly, know where to access support during this time.

[1] https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-02-27/coronavirus-quarantine-raises-mental-health-concerns-for-china

[2] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-mental/chinese-public-dial-in-for-support-as-coronavirus-takes-mental-toll-idUSKBN2070H2

[3] https://www.mhinnovation.net/sites/default/files/downloads/resource/IASC%20Interim%20Briefing%20Note%20on%20COVID-19%20Outbreak%20Readiness%20and%20Response%20Operations%20-%20MHPSS.pdf

[4] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html

[5] https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2020/03/22/9-mental-health-practices-to-maintain-or-begin-during-coronavirus-lockdown/#6cbd5f2f4264

LIST OF USEFUL CONTACTS:

- Covid-19 24 hour hotline: 0800 029 999 / Whatsapp: 0600 123 456 type "hi"
- SADAG Mental Health Line: 011 234 4837
- Cipla 24hr Mental Health Helpline: 0800 456 789
- SAPS Crime stop: 08600 10111 / SMS Crime Line 32211
- Childline: 0800 055 555
- Women Abuse Helpline: 0800 150 150
- Suicide Helpline: 0800 567 567
- GBV Command Centre: 0800 428 428 or *120*7867# from any cellphone

- Department of Social Development Substance Abuse Line 24hr helpline: 0800 12 13 14
- Persons with Disabilities: SMS "help" to 31531
- National AIDS Helpline: 0800 012 322
- National Department of Health (NDoH): https://www.health.gov.za
- National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD): https://www.nicd.ac.za
- World Health Organisation: https://www.who.int