

Colleagues,

When I last wrote to you at the end of January, it was difficult to imagine that COVID-19 would be the force throughout our global community it has become today. It was only nine days ago that the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it a global pandemic; since then we have seen countries around the world take unprecedented measures to slow the spread of this new virus.

As is the case for so many other organisations, the work of WPA has been, and will continue to be, affected. Travel restrictions, together with the border closures and limits on public gatherings we are seeing in many countries, mean we have had to change some plans already.

First among these is the need to postpone our regional meeting that was to be held in St Petersburg in May. We're now working with the Russian Psychiatric Association to finalise new dates for the meeting and will post them on our website in coming days. A wonderful scientific program has been developed for the congress, together with high-level participation, and we trust this will be transferred to the later dates. It is also likely that a number of WPA co-sponsored meetings will be modified or delayed in coming weeks. We therefore urge you to watch the website for immediate updates on any changes to plans or events.

In addition to this work on meetings, we are also resetting priorities and conducting more and more of our business online. WPA's work as a facilitator of knowledge-sharing is more important now than ever before. You already know that one of our key roles is to link the work of our many components so that we can share best practice and learn from each other. This premise takes on a new level of importance when considering the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital that we listen to and learn from each other's experiences so that we can help to slow the spread of the virus and ease the burden on our health systems.

As psychiatrists and mental health professionals, we all know it is not only the physical effects of COVID-19 that are detrimental for society, but also the mental health effects. As well as supporting people with mental ill health, supporting everybody's mental health is key.

To this end, we invite you to share with us what YOU are doing to support your communities so that we, in turn, can share it with our global network via our website.

A number of our members have already approached us to tell us where their focus lies at this time, the issues they see as the most important to address and the messages they are communicating with their local communities. I'm pleased to include some of those below. I'm also including some links to other trusted sources and resources. Our goal is to build a library of information that will be helpful to you as we navigate this together.

Over these next months, WPA will be using our website to keep you updated not only on COVID-19, but on all the other work we and our valued partners are doing around the world. We know people are looking for the best available information while having to act in the face of uncertainty, and it is our goal to provide that to you in the simplest way we can. We urge you to share with us any updates, tools, tips and good news stories you might have – and to visit our website regularly for the most up-to-date information.

I know that many of you are on the frontline of the work to protect mental health among the populations in your countries, the people affected by the virus and their families, and among your colleagues. Please be sure to let us know (the WPA Executive Committee and Secretariat) how else WPA may be able to assist you and the demanding work you are doing in this emergency.

Wishing you all healthy and well in the coming months and more.

Helen

Prof Helen Herrman AO

WPA President

RESOURCES

World Health Organisation (WHO)

<http://www.emro.who.int/mnh/publications/mental-health-support-during-covid-19.html?format=html>

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf?sfvrsn=6d3578af_8&ua=1

World Economic Forum (WEF)

Managing mental health during coronavirus - people around the world share insights from the World Economic Forum

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/covid19-coronavirus-mental-health-expert-insights/>

From Canada

Complete Mental Health Guide During Covid-19 Pandemic

<https://peak-resilience.com/blog/2020/3/15/covid-19-amp-your-mental-health-a-comprehensive-resource-guide>

From Australia

A selection of COVID-19 Mental Health support information and resources

<https://www.lifeinmindaustralia.com.au/support-for-those-impacted-by-adverse-events/mental-health-support-for-covid-19>

From Hong Kong (The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists)

- We have seen the panic that has ensued across the globe over the supply of daily amenities and disinfectant products. Many people are being asked to “self-isolate” and “quarantine” increasing the likelihood of feelings of anxiety and isolation.
- Mental health issues can also lead to increased risks of infection due to failure to identify symptoms of COVID-19 early and seek proper assessment and care. They can reduce or bias a person’s awareness about public health advice on prevention of COVID-19.
- Mental health facilities are high-risk areas of cross-infection where there is limited vigilance by staff working in mental health facilities, and a lack of personal protective equipment.
- Patients and carers suffering from COVID-19, people under quarantine arrangements, and healthcare workers caring for the above groups are vulnerable groups for mental health problems. They need active support in enhancing their mental health resilience, enhancing access to assessment and possibly interventions utilising the telephone or/and internet technology.
- Practical tips on enhancing mental health resilience will be valuable for the purpose.

From Buenos Aires, Argentina (Asociación de Psiquiatras Argentinos)

1. The main source of information should always be the National Sanitary Authority, in our case, the National Ministry of Health. Other sources are less reliable in the middle of a sanitary crisis.
2. There are two basic aspects in the management of a Pandemic like this. The first one being the epidemic technical handling, and the second one being the mass communication side. In the latter aspect, the role of psychiatrists is essential in building a message that generates awareness instead of generalized fear. The choice of the right words and metaphors is one of the most delicate tasks at the moment.
3. It is urgent to bring back the ability to think, that is, to carry out a critical analysis of the information received. Serenity is needed to achieve this. Serenity to think, responsibility to take care of all of us.
4. The main goal of restrictive measures is to isolate the virus, but not the population subjectivity. We need to encourage solidarity. Measures of due care are thought to take care of all, not to leave aside or discriminate.
5. It is essential to help people to understand the temporal dimension of crisis. It is not the end of the world, but a critical situation with a beginning and an end.

6. As physicians, we need to ensure that our public words are help to understand basic sanitary concepts. At the same time, we should keep in mind that coronavirus is not the only sanitary problem worldwide, just the most urgent in this context.
7. We also need to inform that in this situation ER Services should not be collapsed, any given telephone numbers should be used for a preliminary *triage*.