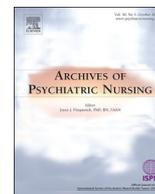


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Editorial

Assuring mental health during our current pandemic



Amidst the social distancing, the long lines for coronavirus testing, and most especially the stress within the COVID-19 units within our hospitals, it is important that we remind ourselves, our families, our patients, and our professional colleagues to attend to their mental health. Based on our mental health background we all know what works. Yet it is, at times, difficult to take the first step to the walk in the woods, the meditation, the exercise, the yoga, and the reflection. At times I have found myself staring at the computer screen, not motivated to move forward in any direction.

Here are some well-known and well-publicized tips for mental health. Many of these have been available in other formats, across the public and professional media, yet they bear repetition in as many forms and as often as possible.

Stay connected. Of course, social distancing makes it difficult, particularly for those who do not have access to technology. Try for some small wins. Reach out to a colleague or a relative who you have not seen for years, just to say hello. Phone calls and voice messages of encouragement for welcomed by almost everyone. They are not hollow expressions of the fact that we are all in this together. Make certain that you say hello to those who you pass when walking or jobbing (even if keeping the 6 ft of distance). It is important to acknowledge our neighbors and others who we may never see again. This pandemic gives us a unique chance to share our experience, through a simple hello.

Teach others best practices in meditation. One minute of silence, meditation, and reflection can center us. Each of us can make this a part of our daily routine.

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of the pandemic and the one that therefore causes us the most anxiety is the uncertainty...about the extent of the future change in our lives, of the contagion of the virus itself, and of the time that will be required for any aspects of our lives to

be re-captured. Some of our mental health experts have described our current experiences as grieving, with the various stages experienced all at once. Grieving takes time and this pandemic is so pervasive that it will take much time for our recovery. But just as with other grieving experiences such as the loss of a loved one, it is important to reflect on the positive aspects of our past experiences and think about how we will re-experience them in the future. Perhaps we will be relieved when we can go back to our places of work, instead of dreading the drive to the office each day.

We also may choose to savor some of the positives of these past months. For example, we can continue our exercise routines and meditation schedules once we have secured the habits. And the use of tele mental health and virtual health care in many aspects of our lives may continue to free up time for all of us. It also is likely that some of the changes in restrictive regulations on advanced practice nurses might be permanent rather than only emergency measures. We have seen changes in these regulations at both the federal and state levels, and expect more changes to come.

We also have seen an outpouring of public support for the health care heroes, nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists, and all ancillary hospital personnel on the front lines in hospitals. We also hear gratitude for the essential workers everywhere, keeping our communities safe, functioning, and fed.

Most of all it is important to maintain our sanity, for ourselves and others. There will be a time in the not too distant future when we will need all of the sanity we can muster.

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