

Dear health professionals,

We are fully aware of the challenges you have been facing and, as clinical psychologists and psychotherapists, we have developed a brief set of recommendations that we hope you might find useful these days. A part of it had already been created based on cooperation with medical teams of the Masaryk Memorial Cancer Institute in Brno, Czech Republic.

- More than ever before, keep in mind your limits. Work towards helping, not sacrificing yourself. Being able to look after yourself is not a sign of selfishness; the more of use you will be to those who need you.
- This involves seemingly trivial things that are part of our biological support system: feel free to use the toilet, drink, eat, or isolate yourself for a few minutes, wherever possible.
- During the day, occasionally stop for a few moments, slowly inhale and exhale for three times (increasing the tone of your parasympathetic nervous system), and become aware of what you are experiencing and where you are. Name three things in your mind that you can see around you (a part of the U.S. Army training). This is a way to anchor in the present moment, in your objective skills, and prevents stress you are unaware of.
- Shake your body. Yes, it may sound strange, but try to shake your entire body in an uncoordinated way for as long as you find it pleasant. Your body may be under tension, with the small muscle bundles being tense without you feeling it. This reduces, among other things, the likelihood of developing PTSD (body shaking is the main principle of the TRE® technique used in war zones).
- If possible, work with at least one colleague you get on well with and who you can share silly jokes with to keep in good spirits.
- You are encouraged to air your own feelings (fatigue, fear, frustration, feelings of injustice, etc.); being in contact with another person helps to better realise that you're not going through it alone.
- Appreciate yourself as well as your colleagues, be merciful to yourself, and consciously remind yourself that you are helping others. If you start doing everything automatically as an obligation, feelings of powerlessness and overload will occur, causing a change in endocrine reactions (victim = adrenalin, cortisol; helping others = serotonin, oxytocin, endogenous opioids).
- Strengths last longer when replenished. If you have any leisure time at all, have a rest, watch a film, do some sports. If possible, get enough sleep as an important health protective factor under all circumstances.
- Go on a media diet, during time off work abstain from checking the situation at your workplace, in your country as well as the world. You're certainly not going to miss anything important.

The people coming to see you are under stress. They are experiencing anxiety, anger, frustration, or helplessness, followed by shame for and guilt over the way they behave. These are natural reactions. Unfortunately, their behaviour may even be hostile, irritable, or seemingly stupid and uninformed.

It is essential to:

- Provide your patients with clear and comprehensible instructions delivered in a kind manner, yet at the same time with an attitude of a professional authority.
- Try not to take their behaviour too personally. Express understanding, but also oppose possible verbal aggression (aimed, in fact, not at you, but at the situation).
- Show a sense of belonging and reduce possible further stress, e.g. “It is a challenging situation for all of us, but together we’ll handle it.”
- If there is time and space for it, provide simple reassurance, such as “Every crisis has its end, every outbreak will pass. There have been worse epidemics in history. The coronavirus is not a plague, killing all living things. It does not pose a direct risk to life for the majority of the population. However, for vulnerable groups it does, and that’s where adherence to the measures is crucial, otherwise the healthcare system will get overwhelmed and won’t be able to help those in need.”
- Advise those who have fears or mental complaints to make contact by phone or email with psychologists that can be found on the internet. Many of them are prepared to provide crisis intervention services remotely to both the public and healthcare providers.

In conjunction with this material, we have developed a set of recommendations for the public that, among other things, aims at contributing to your protection and consideration from the part of the patients. Take care and hold on.

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