

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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on

The COVID 19 Pandemic

Background

COVID 19 Pandemic & its psychological impact.

The covid 19 pandemic has affected 210 countries of the world including India. To contain the spread of the virus the country has been in lock-down since 23.3.2020. It has resulted in disruption of normal life and a stress of unprecedented proportion. The psychological impact is immense & varied with virtually all being affected as mentioned below

General Public:

- Fear of harm to self & near & dear ones living with the person
- Fear of harm to near & dear ones living far away from the person
- Forced to adopt another life style Eg :
 - Staying at home the whole day is stressful for most men
 - For many women; having the husband at home throughout the day could be stressful
- Nothing to do at home.
- Loss of Income
- Patients with medical illness are facing problems because of inaccessibility of Drs & unavailability of medications.
- Fear of contamination from currency notes, fruits and vegetables from the market (because news

Persons in conflict with law:

- Had to be forcefully admitted, FIR lodged against them; Hit by police

Persons at risk (potential cases (h/o contact)):

- Self isolation, fear & uncertainty

Persons in quarantine (+ cases)

- Isolation may be very stressful

Patients of Covid 19

- *Patients admission in Hospital/ ICU: Stress for themselves & family*

Doctors:

- Doctors treating COVID 19 patients in the hospital
 - Constant fear of contracting Corona virus/ death
 - Conflict between duty & self protection
 - Overworked
 - Lack of none / appropriate Personal Protection equipments
 - Some have been victims of physical violence, and sexual abuse
 - Families of the doctors are under stress
 - Patients relapsing because of non-availability of medication
 - Helplessness because of difficulty in help patients because of limited facilities

Law enforcing machinery: Police

- Enforcing lock down
- Fear of harm to self , some have been beaten
- Tracing the potential contacts

Government:

- Great responsibility, which is challenging

- No past experience
- Defiance of government order on lock-down by some persons

Psychiatrists

- Helplessness because:
 - Priority to Covid 19 treatment has led to less attention to routing psychiatric care, including emergencies.
 - Many psychiatrists are resorting to Telemedicine, which has been recently permitted by the government. However, they are finding it difficult to treat without tranquillizer or hypnotics. It may be noted that under Telemedicine prescription of Scheduled X drugs (eg menyl Phenidate) & Controlled drugs covered in NDPS Act (eg clonazepam and zolpidem) is prohibited.

Response:

Response has been from all corners of the country.

People are coping as best as they can.

Government is doing its best to meet the challenge by: 1) Providing essentials. 2) Educating about Covid 19. 3) 4) Providing for testing, isolation, quarantine and treatment of corona patients 4) Releasing “Guidelines on Telemedicine” & permitting the same 5) Several other measures

Indian Association for Social Psychiatry:

Our association has acted promptly by posting the CME on “Medical Students: Challenges and Wellness Initiatives” scheduled on 20th April, and all other programs on hold. It matter of great satisfaction that many of our members are active in running awareness and counseling services for the community.

We are at present in phase II of the pandemic. The moot point here is regarding the role of psychiatrists and other mental health professionals in this period of crisis.

Message by President to:

People in General

- Remember:
 - The “covid 19 pandemic” has affected the world which includes you. The “covid 19 pandemic” is a stress of high proportion.
 - Stress is an inseparable part of life,
 - Do not panic; take the stress as part of the life package.
 - Also, do not panic because you need to take major decisions, as well as organize your behavior to cope with this stress.
 - Health and ill-health are part of the life package given us by Almighty, so if you are ill take treatment advised by doctors/ specialists.
- Educate yourself about the problem, how identify it & how to cope with it (the “Dos” & “Don’ts”)
- Take only reliable information. In case of doubt seek clarifications from reliable sources eg Website of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. www.mohfw.gov.in
- If you are in trouble don’t hesitate to take help as per the prescribed procedure
- Remember the government, doctors & paramedical staff, & law enforcing machinery, are your guardians during this period of crisis so cooperate with them; don’t be defiant
- Maintain emotional contact with your near and dear ones
- Maintain a healthy life style, which means a balanced routine comprising:
 1. 8 hours of sleep
 2. Daily bathing & toileting & other self-help skills
 3. Prayer for 5-10minutes
 4. Food 4 times a day (Diabetics 5 times a day)

5. Aerobic exercise 40 minutes/ day, (either, 40 minutes once a day or 20minutes twice daily). Exercise can be in the form of stationery running, skipping or dancing, or any other convenient exercise). Start with 10 minutes/ day, increasing the time weekly till it is for 40 minutes/ day
 6. Reading daily news paper & viewing a TV news channel for about 15min to 30 min
 7. Work for 3 to 8 hours/day depending upon your age, health and need
 8. Recreation and / talent promotion in the form of indoor games (chess, cards)/ music/ dance/ for 1-2 hours /day.
 9. Other activities as per your choice and need
- Take the lock-down as a God given opportunity to complete your pending work, pursue your talent, learn and engage in new activities, spend more time with spouse & children, etc.
 - Always be optimistic. Remember that every problem has a solution.

Psychiatrists:

- Take care of your health, because charity begins with self, then family, then patient, then society. Take all the precautions that have been advocated eg distancing, sanitization etc
- Enquire and document, along with ID proof, history of travel from abroad or contact with a potential patient of Covid 19 in the last 30 days, or presence of symptoms of viral infection (fever, cough and breathless, loss of taste and smell). Refer all such cases to fever clinics.
- Discharge maximum number of patients, and advise longer period of follow up
- If you are not treating acute psychiatric patients refer them to hospitals where the facility is available.
- Don't reject patients who can't come in person; practice telemedicine.
- Help your patients in whatever way you can by answering their queries and giving advice on treatment. The minimum that one can do is to provide psychological support in this period of crisis.
- Keep abreast of the advisories issued by government from time to time.
- Keep in touch with psychiatrist colleagues to learn from their experience and boost up their morale
- Also, keep in contact with your medical colleagues to enquire about their health & boost up their morale.
- Inform the government or local administration about major problems relating to patient care, Eg, availability of medicines (eg, tranquillizers) , admission of patients with acute psychiatric emergencies, along with specific request (s) to overcome the same.
- Team up with paraprofessional staff (nurses, psychologists & social workers) and educate people about the corona pandemic and ways to cope with it, and also provide psychological support to tide away the crisis.
- Cooperate with the administration, government & law enforcing machinery.



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