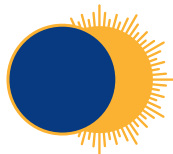


Staff support during COVID-19

This booklet is for all staff who work at the RHN – whether you are clinical or non-clinical, working from home or working at the RHN site, and whether you are working in your usual job role or having to adapt to a very different style of working at the moment. The executive team and senior managers want all of you to know that we value what you are doing to help our RHN community at this unusual time. We look forward to welcoming you all back to the RHN in full health soon. In the meantime, this booklet offers you some practical advice, tips to look after your wellbeing, and some information that we hope you will find useful.



Royal Hospital for
Neuro-disability

Created by the RHN Clinical
Psychology team

Factual information about the virus

There are many myths and misunderstandings going around about COVID-19, particularly on social media. It's really important to make sure you get all of your information about the virus from reliable sources, which include the government's website (www.gov.uk) and the NHS website (www.nhs.uk).

There are rumours going around on social media that say that we don't know what COVID-19 is, or how it is transmitted. These rumours are untrue. We know that COVID-19 is a type of virus called a coronavirus. Its name, COVID-19, tells us about this:

- 'CO' stands for Corona
- 'VI' stands for virus
- 'D' stands for disease
- '19' tells us that the virus emerged in 2019

The virus spreads through droplets of saliva, or from the secretions that come out of the mouth or nose when someone who has the virus coughs or sneezes. The most common way that the infection is passed on is when these droplets or secretions land on surfaces, and then a person who doesn't have the virus touches those surfaces, and transfers the virus to themselves by touching their own mouth, nose or eyes. This is why there is so much emphasis on washing our hands!

The other – less common – way that the infection is passed on is if the droplets are passed on directly, for example if someone with the infection coughs or sneezes directly into the mouth, nose or eyes of another person. This is less common because the droplets don't hang around in the air, they fall and settle on surfaces. However, this method of transmission is the reason why people are advised to keep two metres apart from others, and why healthcare professionals who treat people with COVID-19 need to wear the appropriate PPE.

What effects has COVID-19 had on the RHN?

Impact on our patients and residents

As you can imagine, the RHN community has been a very different place from usual for our patients and residents! LAFS and other activities have been suspended and they have had to cope without having face-to-face visits from their families and friends.

Unfortunately, but inevitably, some of our patients and residents have tested positive for COVID-19 and a small number of our most vulnerable residents have sadly died during this time period. However, the good news is that the vast majority of our patients and residents remain safe and well. This includes the majority of those who have tested positive for COVID-19, who have now recovered from the illness in spite of their vulnerability. This shows what good care they have received from RHN staff. We would like to thank all staff who have contributed to this care, and our patients and residents for being so understanding about all of the changes we have had to make to keep them safe.

At the time of writing, almost all of the RHN wards have now come out of lockdown, meaning that patients and residents are able to access day areas and the gardens once again – a great sign that things will eventually get back to normal.

Impact on our visitors

The current situation has understandably been very stressful for our visitors, as they have been unable to visit the RHN site. Please be assured that RHN has been trying to support our visitors in any way we can. Our ward-based staff have been helping patients and residents to have telephone and video contact with their relatives, and our Chaplain, senior managers and nurses, and clinical psychologists have been offering additional support to those relatives who have been finding the situation particularly challenging.

Impact on staff

We are aware that the measures taken have impacted on all of our staff, regardless of where you work at the RHN. Most of our non-clinical staff have been asked to work at home. This brings its own challenges, including being socially isolated from other people, and making it hard to keep boundaries between work and home life. It can be odd having to stay apart from your colleagues and being detached from the wider RHN community. Please be assured that we appreciate all of the hard work you are doing, and that staying off-site has been the best thing you can do to keep yourself and the RHN safe.

If you're working on site, you'll know the atmosphere is very different from usual. The main hospital corridor is empty, and all of the shared spaces such as Reed's café and the De Lancey Lowe room are closed. It can feel a lonelier place than usual! Whatever role you're in, you'll have been wearing more PPE than you usually do, and seeing your colleagues do the same. You may have felt anxious about protecting yourself and others from the virus. You may be feeling resentful that you still have to come to work on public transport, while other colleagues are working from home. We want you to know that we realise this hasn't always been easy, but that we are very grateful for all of your efforts.

If you've been doing a role that's very different from usual, this can also bring a variety of feelings. Perhaps you've found a sense of purpose and are enjoying a new challenge. Or perhaps you have been feeling de-skilled and inefficient, or worried about how you'll adapt back to your normal role. We're very lucky that we have staff who've been so willing to adapt to these changes, and we'll do everything we can to support you returning to your usual role when the time is right.

For many staff, the unusual situation has led to feelings of guilt. We've heard that some people working from home have felt guilty that they're safe at home while colleagues have been travelling on public transport to work with patients who have COVID-19. We've also heard some on-site staff questioning whether their role is essential, and who've felt guilty that they've been travelling to the RHN rather than staying at home with the country lockdown. These are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. It's very easy for us to draw comparisons and to be particularly critical of ourselves and others. It's important to remind ourselves that we don't know anybody else's individual circumstances. Perhaps they're in a vulnerable category and have been told to shield themselves? Maybe they've been working long hours at home because that's where their skills are best used? Comparisons and judgements can be unhelpful. What we do know that helps is taking those extra steps to be kind to ourselves and each other – think about what you can do today to make tomorrow better. Please be aware that whatever your personal circumstances, we're grateful for all of your efforts, and remain keen to support you in whatever way we can – now, and when the lockdown starts to ease.

Feeling anxious, depressed or helpless

This global pandemic has created a difficult and frightening time. Feelings such as anxiety, worry, depression, and helplessness are all normal reactions to this very unusual situation and it is okay to not be okay. As human beings, we all want to feel in control of our lives, and yet the virus has robbed us of this power! We are all aware that scientists all around the world are still learning about this virus and its effects, and at the time of writing, there are no known effective vaccines, or proven cures. This creates a lot of uncertainty which can feel very uncomfortable.

Experiencing symptoms of stress does not mean you aren't up to your job or that you are not coping. It means you are human. Try to recognise how you are feeling and be kind towards yourself and others. It may be helpful to remind yourself to take it one step at a time, or one day at a time. Please see our Wellbeing section below for other suggestions about how to take care of yourself and distract yourself as best you can.

What if I'm feeling so anxious or depressed that I can't cope?

A lot of people have found this situation to be so distressing that they have felt overwhelmed with their emotions. If this applies to you, then please do seek help. Your mental health is as important as your physical health. Think of it this way – if something goes wrong with your physical health then you are likely to look for help to fix it. For example, if you break your leg then you go to a hospital to get an x-ray and a cast to help it mend; if you get a bad chest infection then you go to a doctor to get antibiotics so that you get better as quickly as possible. There is no reason to treat your mental health any differently, and lots of sources of help are available!

If any of you feel like you are really struggling to cope, then we want to help you find the right source of support for you. For example, if you are feeling very tearful every day, or feeling as if your anxiety is so overwhelming that you're not sure how you are going to get through the day, or if you are potentially feeling as if you might harm yourself or others, then it is important that you get help.

Here are some places where you might find the right help for you:

Help you can access as an RHN employee

The employee assistance programme (CiC counselling service)

All RHN employees can access a confidential counselling service provided by CiC. You can access their 'Well Online' programme on their website (www.well-online.co.uk - login: rhlogin; password: wellbeing). In addition to the counselling service, their website contains information, advice and practical tips. You can also contact them by telephone (0800 085 1376) or email (assist@cic-eap.co.uk). Please be assured that CiC will not disclose your name to your line manager or anyone else at RHN – they have very strict rules about protecting the confidentiality of any staff who get in touch with them.

Help from healthcare sources outside the RHN

Your GP

Your GP is a really good place to start if you need help for any type of emotional distress because all GPs have lots of experience in having these sorts of conversations - according to a recent survey done by the charity MIND, 40% of all GP appointments involve mental health!

Your GP will help you to work out if you need urgent help, and where to get it from. They can also advise you on medicines, talking therapies, or other wellbeing activities that might help you if your needs are less urgent. Your GP will know that different strategies suit different people, so they will understand if some ideas appeal to you but others do not, and they will not try to force you to try anything that doesn't feel right to you.

Call 111

If you realise you need help when your GP surgery is closed, or if you feel uncomfortable talking to your GP for whatever reason, the NHS 111 number is available for calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This phoneline is staffed by health professionals with training in both physical and mental health, and they will be able to help you identify what help you need and where you can get it.

IAPT – Increasing access to psychological therapies

Wherever you live, your borough will have access to an IAPT service, which stands for ‘Improving Access to Psychological Therapies’. These services give people the chance to try out talking therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which have been shown to be helpful for people who are distressed, anxious, and/or depressed.

Your GP can refer you to an IAPT service. However, if you prefer not to speak to your GP, you can contact your local service directly and refer yourself – to do this, use any internet search engine to look for your borough and IAPT (e.g. type “Wandsworth IAPT” into Google).

In an emergency – call 999

If you are at immediate risk of hurting yourself or someone else, then call 999. Immediate risk of harm to a person is always considered an emergency, and you will be able to get help very quickly.

If there is any reason why you feel you can’t call 999, other sources of emergency support include the Samaritans (Freephone number 116 123), or MIND (they have an ‘I need urgent help’ button at www.mind.org.uk).

Remember that all of the people who deal with these types of calls have lots of experience talking to people who are feeling distressed. They will be keen to listen to you and help you find the support you need.

Informal sources of help

Perhaps you feel that you are still coping reasonably well, or that you don’t want to trouble health care professionals with your worries. Whilst your GP and the other suggestions above are always available to you, there are other ways that people try to find support when they feel unhappy or worried.

Family or friends

Are there members of your family or friendship groups who may be able offer support to you? Even if you haven’t been in touch for a while, you may be surprised by how pleased people are to be contacted. Imagine if the situation was reversed, and one of your friends reached out to you for help and support – how would you feel? Most people like to feel helpful to others, and all of us can empathise with how challenging the lockdown has been. You may find that you strengthen some of your relationships for a lasting positive change!

People within your faith group

Many people find comfort from others who share their faith. Have you considered reaching out to a priest, rabbi, imam, or other person of faith, who may be able to offer you spiritual guidance or link you in with others from your community?


What if I think I have symptoms of the virus?

If you or a member of your household develop symptoms that you suspect might be COVID-19 then don't worry! RHN has a dedicated COVID-19 team who will talk to you about your symptoms and give you advice. You can contact them on 07464 496354. This line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our team may recommend that you or your family member have a swab test to check for the presence of the virus. Again, don't worry, as they will explain the process to you in detail and help you to work out the practicalities. While you are waiting for your result, someone from the team will make a welfare call to you every couple of days to see how you are. These welfare calls will continue if your result turns out to be positive – so you don't need to feel that you need to cope with it all on your own. The team will also help you to work out when you are well enough to come back to work.

We have all heard news stories about people being seriously unwell or even dying from this virus. So it is totally understandable that you may feel very anxious about your own health. This may be particularly true if you or a member of your household have underlying health conditions, or if you have to travel to and from work on public transport, or if your job role involves close contact with other people - such as washing and dressing our patients, or delivering hands-on therapy.

It is really important to remember that the vast majority of people who have COVID-19 will experience a mild illness and make a full recovery. For anyone unfortunate enough to have a more severe illness, help is available – and our COVID-19 team will make sure that you know how to access that help if you need it.



Interacting with patients, residents or colleagues who have had the virus

It is understandable that you may feel anxious about mixing with patients or colleagues who have had the virus. However, please be assured that our infection control team are constantly keeping on top of all of the latest information about the virus and we would not knowingly put anyone in our RHN community at risk.

As we said above, even though most of our patients and residents are in highly vulnerable categories, the majority of those who have had COVID-19 have had a mild illness. We always make sure that RHN follows Public Health England guidance about use of PPE (personal protective equipment) and we have very strict guidance in place about how we judge when our patients and residents have recovered so that the PPE rules can be relaxed. At the time of writing, we are still asking all of our staff on site to wear facemasks and either uniforms or scrubs so that we do everything we can to minimise the risk of transmission in our community.

Obviously, if you are a staff member who has had COVID-19, then you do not need to share this information with your colleagues. However, we also want to make sure that all of our RHN community understand that there is no shame in having had this virus! It is really important to remind yourself that a virus doesn't 'choose' to infect some people rather than others and it doesn't discriminate between different people. We have seen that COVID-19 is something that anyone can catch, including celebrities, sports stars, and even the Prime Minister!

Some of our RHN staff who have had the virus have offered to share their stories with the wider staff team to help us all see that it can happen to anyone, but that most of us will have a mild illness and get better quickly. Here are their stories, and their words of advice:

'I was at work when I developed symptoms. I thought I was just too tired but when I got home, I developed a high temperature, sore throat, tightness in the chest, headache and extreme fatigue. I phoned the Covid hotline and I was advised to self-isolate, which I did. I felt terrible for the next three to four days and I lost my appetite. I'm not one to say no to food, and if I do, you know that my sickness is serious! I felt scared for myself and some of my colleagues, some of whom were also sick and in isolation at the time. I gathered some strength and sent a text message to them to be strong and that we were going to beat this. It was through encouraging my colleagues that I also got encouraged. After two weeks plus, I started to feel better. I'm now back to work and am stronger than ever. There is healing after COVID-19. I'm still standing! You too can beat it should you catch it, but try not to! Wash your hands, use surgical masks at all times and observe social distancing.'

– Phyllis Chisala (Ward Manager)

'Late in March, I caught COVID-19 from my husband, who works at an airport. The worst thing about it were the body aches and losing my sense of taste and smell. I hated not being able to taste my food (I just love food too much!) But I was surprised by how mild the whole thing was - I've had much worse flus that have lasted much longer. This time, I was back to normal in less than 10 days. So please everyone – stay safe and vigilant, keep washing your hands, and stick to the facts!'

– Dr Sofia Robleda (Clinical Psychologist)

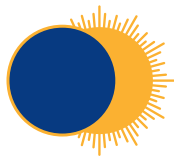
'Early in April, I tested positive for COVID-19. Like most people, I had mild symptoms which included fever (twice during the period), loss of taste, and lethargy. If you've had malaria before, it's a similar feeling, though I've had worse. However, I recovered quickly and went back to work on Day 8. I think the worse part of it for me was the psychological part; as in what the media does to you. The best advice I had from my colleague was to stop watching the news. Once I did, I was a lot better. Best advice I can give is stay safe and keep your distance!'

– Crispina Lot-Thomas (Ward Sister)

Wellbeing resources

It is really important to look after your mental wellbeing as well as your physical health. This is particularly important, and difficult, when you are feeling unwell and may have additional worries about your health or your family's health. Here are some ideas to help you manage this. These are mainly taken from the RHN website, where there are other resources that may also help: <https://www.rhn.org.uk/coronavirus/tips-for-wellbeing/>

1. Try to focus on today rather than thinking about the future. Take each day one day at a time.
2. You may be tempted to 'read up' on news articles about the disease, but check whether it is actually helpful to your emotions. If it isn't, then try to limit how much time you are spending listening to the news or reading about COVID-19 on social media.
3. Get your information from legitimate news sources or the UK Government website. Watch the news to be informed by it, not absorbed by it.
4. Keep in touch with your family and friends – for example by using phone calls, video calls, or text messaging.
5. Think about activities you can do at home that may distract you. For example, have a long bath, read a book, create art, listen to music, watch a TV show or film that you've never got around to watching before.
6. Try out some relaxation strategies such as mindfulness or calming breathing techniques; www.headspace.com have great free resources.
7. Laughing is good for our wellbeing. Think about re-watching a favourite comedy show or try watching one you've never heard of before. There are lots of options available on free channels such as BBC iplayer.
8. Be kind to yourself and maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking. Remember that most people have a mild illness and then feel better again.
9. Do something you usually enjoy. Even if you don't really feel like making the effort, tell yourself that it's worth a go. You may be surprised at the lift you get from concentrating on something that's more enjoyable than the news.
10. Make a list of things you want to do when this is all over. Think about how much you are looking forward to doing the things on your list.



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