

# **Staying Safe & Well: A Self Care Guide for Staff looking after patients with Coronavirus**

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This advice is for any member of Healthcare Staff looking after patients with Coronavirus.

# As we are all aware coronavirus and the illness it causes is infecting increasing numbers of people in the UK.

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We know from recent public statements that the pandemic is likely to be disruptive to our own lives, the way we provide care and may be a cause of natural anxiety.

A spotlight is shining on the important work we do every day to care for our fellow citizens when they are very unwell. Amid the anxiety about the impact of the pandemic, there is a fresh appreciation and gratitude for our labour and a desire to support you as best we can as you look after people with coronavirus.

We know that the staff and the NHS will demonstrate an ongoing commitment to our patients and their care.

However, research tells us that frontline health care workers are at risk for increased psychological distress due to the demands that these type of events cause.

In this leaflet we're going to consider some of the exceptional demands that will be made of you in the coming weeks and months and make some suggestions on how you might take care of yourself and your colleagues. We hope it will be of some assistance.

**Thank you for everything you're doing for all of us.**

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## What Makes for Resilient Staff and What Can You Do to Look After Yourself:

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In normal times, most of us, most of the time, will cope well with the demands of our work roles. We do this through a combination of personal and professional factors and in a social and organisational context.

Good stress management skills, a sense of expertise and professionalism, social support at work and at home and the satisfaction of an important job done to the best of your ability all work to buffer us against some of the emotional and psychological impact of working with people who are critically unwell. It is likely that the sadness associated with a patient's death is balanced by the reward of those who recover and the knowledge that we did everything you could to help. Outside of work we will recharge our batteries through spending time with family and friends, exercising and engaging in hobbies and pleasurable activities.

Being emotionally and psychologically resilient doesn't mean that we're unaffected by the adversity we encounter in life. Instead, resilience refers to the ability to recover from adversity, and this ability to "bounce back" depends on the balance between the demands that are made on us and the resources we have available at any given time. When things get out of kilter and we're under stress, it is helpful to see if there are any demands we can remove or reduce and to identify the additional resources that can be added to restore balance.

The current pandemic has the potential to up-end the resilience scales of our communities and country. Below are some suggestions on how you may keep yours in balance.

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## Normality:

- + Recognising that we are entering a phase where all of us may have to work differently and adopt new behaviours is important. These things will become 'the new normal' for a period of time.
- + This period is likely to go on for a number of months. Recognising that and pacing ourselves, as much as possible, will be helpful.
- + Even if we are doing a task that is familiar, doing it in an unfamiliar environment (a different ward) or in PPE, means there is the potential for things to take longer and for distress or fatigue. It is important to be patient with ourselves and our colleagues as we adapt and learn new ways of delivering care.

## Normal Feelings:

- + This is a different and stressful situation. Anxiety or worry is reasonable in abnormal situations or when circumstances force unwelcome changes and challenges.
- + The presence of these feelings does not indicate psychological problems. Rather it should encourage us to recognise the difficulties of a situation and take meaningful actions to protect ourselves; psychologically and physically.
- + In fact one of the main things we can do to increase our resilience is to understand as much about a threat, and how to mitigate it, as possible. When we understand what it is we face, and are prepared, then psychological distress is reduced.
- + All staff should familiarise themselves with the correct advice about COVID 19 in general but also the area they work in. Here are some of the main sources of reliable information:
  - Health Protection Scotland
  - NHS 24
  - NHS Inform
  - Local management advice

## Information and Support:

- + A highly effective way to increase resilience is through accessing social support. Asking your colleagues how they are coping, sharing worries or success and ensuring that as a team we pull together is all important. Spreading the work and ensuring that there is balance between harder and easier tasks is also important.
- + We must try not to lose sight of our own social connections outside of work. Friends, family, cultural and faith groups all add to our resilience, and the resilience of others. A sense of community connectedness is key during this stressful time. Do what you can to promote that at work and at home.
- + Inevitably some of our normal social contacts will be stretched. Shifts, fatigue, our own or others' self-isolation, or broader government policy may all make contact harder. Therefore, being willing to experiment with new effective ways to maintain these connections is vital.
- + While many of us will use social media and the internet for support there is the potential for rumours and incorrect information to circulate, or for us to become overloaded with distressing news. This can erode our own and our colleague's ability to cope.
- + Therefore we have a responsibility to do our best to circulate what we know to be accurate.

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## Self-Care:

Much of this will be self-evident and familiar as it is what we recommend to our patients. However, in the demands of pandemic we can forget the basics, or set them aside, with the immediate pressures relating to patient care. It is possible that you were under stress before the pandemic and were already finding it harder than usual to cope. While the fresh demands being made on you may distract you from these other worries, your resilience is likely to be less than usual. Please take extra care of yourself and make use of the support that is on offer.

- Recognise your own warning signs (irritability, sleep disturbance, headaches etc) and take steps to look after yourself
- Take care of your body. Diet, sleep, exercise and limiting the use of alcohol is all beneficial.
- Consider learning simple techniques to relax and manage anxiety, using strategies that have worked for you in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. You are most likely to know how to de-stress and you should not be hesitant in keeping yourself psychologically well. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon.
- If you face particularly difficult experiences, remember strong feelings are normal, and these reactions will ease with time
- Some healthcare workers may unfortunately experience avoidance by their family or community due to stigma or fear. This can make an already challenging situation far more difficult. If possible, staying connected with your loved ones including through digital methods is one way to maintain contact. Turn to your colleagues, your manager or other trusted persons for social support- your colleagues may be having similar experiences to you.
- Remember this is a time of uncertainty and stress. Be kind to yourself and allow your distressing emotions to pass.

## Mind Set and Coping:

There are some habits of mind identified in research that can support our resilience.

- Maintaining a sense of hope is important.
- Focusing on what we can do and our own sense of control, where possible, is protective.
- Acceptance that while we and the system are doing our best there will be times when the outcome is not what we would wish, or can reasonably prevent.
- Some people find cultivating a sense of altruism helpful. Recognising that our actions, individually, and collectively as a health service, including working in different ways, and potentially experiencing additional distress ourselves, has a direct, positive impact on those we care for, and the ability for the wider community to manage.
- Reach out. However well we prepare, we all can carry vulnerability, or find particular incidents personally difficult. Anyone is capable of feeling overwhelmed and we have a duty to care for ourselves. Seek support if you feel that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to meet your responsibilities. There are multiple sources of support. Speak to your line manager in the first instance.
- If your colleagues are off work or are self-isolating, they are still part of the team; maintain contact and if appropriate find tasks that maintain everyone's involvement.

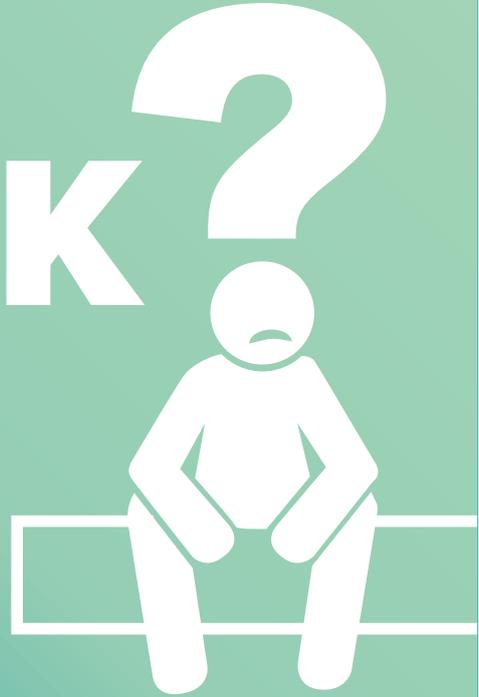
The Intensive Care Society has some great resources and posters about coping with coronavirus as a professional and also ways you can look after yourself.

It's really important to check in with yourself and check if you are ok:

# AM I OK?

1

Do you regularly feel **DISCONNECTED** from the relationship of caring for the patient, family, and colleagues?



2

Do you regularly feel **EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION** - like you have nothing left to give?

3

Do you regularly feel **A LACK OF FEELING OF ACCOMPLISHMENT** or feeling **INEFFECTIVE** in what you do?



If you answered **YES** to all three, consider talking to your line manager or someone you trust about the impact of your work.

You may want a referral to your local employee wellbeing service.



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[www.ics.ac.uk](http://www.ics.ac.uk)

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## **If you are struggling, here are some apps, websites and online therapies you can also access yourself:**

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**General Self Help about managing your own mental health and sleep:**

➤ <https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing>

➤ <http://mentalhealthsupport.co.uk/ns/>

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**On line self-help programs you can access to help support your mental health and sleep:**

➤ <https://www.sleepio.com/>

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## Useful Apps:

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**Mind Shift** is a mental health app designed specifically for teens and young adults with anxiety. Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations.



**Self Help for Anxiety Management** might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time, and learn 25 different self-help techniques. You can also use SAM's "Social Cloud" feature to confidentially connect with other users in an online community for additional support.



**Happify**, Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts.



The **Headspace** app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus. The app also has a handy "get some headspace" reminder to encourage you to keep practicing each day.



**Calm** provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music. This app is truly universal; whether you've never tried meditation before or regularly practice, you'll find the perfect program for you.



**Smiling Mind** is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. Smiling Mind is a unique tool developed by psychologists and educators to help bring balance to your life. This is really helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.

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There are many other apps you could try which could be helpful; you might find your own that you like better. You can find a list of mental health apps recommended by the NHS [here](#).

There are also many organisations that can provide support which you might find helpful.

### CORONAVIRUS ISOLATION PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVICE (19th MARCH 2020):

- Dr Lynne Taylor, Director of Psychology NHS Grampian
- Mr James Anderson Consultant Clinical Psychologist Clinical Lead North of Scotland Trauma Network

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