



SELF-CARE TIPS IN MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL WELLBEING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

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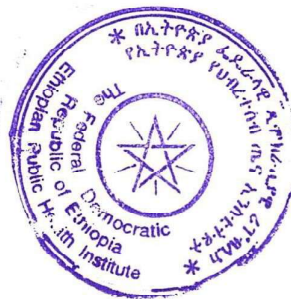
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Introduction

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has seen the world in panic in part due to the speed of its spread, the uncertainties it brings with it, and the challenges each country is facing in trying to manage the problem and its consequences. This pandemic calls primarily for preventive measure, such as self-isolation and protective measures to be taken by each individual. However, health care professionals have the additional task of working at the frontline, with increased work burden, to treat and protect patients and their communities pushing aside their own personal concerns. As the first responders, there is risk of increased stress due to the intense workload, risk to one's own health, and at the same time, the worry about one's family.

We always have to keep in mind that we cannot save others if we do not protect ourselves. Self-care will impact our overall health, our productivity, and makes us resilient. We need to take proactive measures to achieve self-care. Taking care of oneself in these situations is not only an investment in one's own health, but it also increases one's ability to do one's work.

General Objective

- The general objective of this document is to provide tips and options that can help maintain mental health and psychosocial wellbeing for health care professional.

Tips to help with self-care

1. It is good to maintain a healthy routine (regular sleeping hours, regular healthy diet)
2. Exercising regularly, possibly with indoor physical activities, would have positive impact on our mental and physical health.
3. Taking regular breaks during working hours is important: make sure you take few minutes regularly for yourself to do things that you like or have previously helped you in decreasing stress (e.g., listening to music, religious activities, relaxation exercise, other culturally practiced activities).
4. Although the workload and the stress at this time can increase, try limiting the time spent in high intensity settings when possible (eg, staying in hospital after finishing shift, working double shift, etc). Communicating and planning this out with hospital administration in the scheduling working hours will help with your preparation.
5. Communicating with people outside your field (people outside of your profession) through regular phone calls, video-calls, as well as contact with family while taking precautions is important. This will help you feel less isolated in what you are going through and it will help establish a support system. Conversations unrelated to the outbreak will help remind you about other positive things you have in your life.
6. Map out a plan for fair distribution of rotation at work: Team leaders and hospital administrations should work together to make sure that work is being fairly distributed among professionals to decrease the risk of burn out. Each professional should also make this their responsibility, to see that this is being carried out, as no other time like this remind us that we should care about others as much as we care about ourselves.



7. You may have feelings of anxiety, anger, and fear during a crisis of this sort. Be aware of your feelings and plan to meet with your coworkers regularly to talk about your experience in a small group.
8. Mental health practitioners who are giving psychotherapy should schedule a time to take a break after each session to collect their thoughts and reflect on the session.
9. Relaxation exercises are proven to help with managing emotions such as; stress, anxiety, and anger. Practicing these exercises help our body to be in a relaxed state, and to quickly manage negative emotions when they arise. Videos of relaxation exercises for beginners, such as deep breathing exercise, mindfulness exercise, and progressive muscle relaxation, are available on YouTube; you can pick the videos based on the duration and your preference.
10. Prepare yourself for heightened anxiety in patients/clients and care givers during this situation, and have a plan on how to respond, or who to link them with if the need arises. Knowing how to manage other's anxiety helps reduce your own.
11. Do not use alcohol or other substances to cope with stressful situations as these will affect your mental and physical health in the future. Alcohol and substance use can lead to addiction, functional impairment in personal, occupational, and social life, as well as different physical ailments.
12. Limit too much information: as health care professionals, you will need to keep yourself updated about the virus itself and what the government puts out. However, the pandemic will have continuous media coverage and discussion on social media platforms. Try to limit your information source to reputable journals and news updates.
13. As this is like no other time in your life, you will find yourself having to make decisions that are extremely hard, and that will require you to compromise your personal needs/life in (February, 2020) more ways than you are used to previously. Think about your professional responsibilities, and what your values are so that it can help you set your own priorities.
14. This sort of outbreak, and the mental stress health professionals' face in these circumstances, may lead to continuous stress/anxiety despite measures taken to promote mental health by the individual on her/his own. In this circumstance, health care professionals should contact a mental health worker for additional support.

Remember this

Although it may take time, things will get better eventually. As health care professionals, you have faced challenges in the past and were able to overcome them. It's good to remember that as humans, we are resilient, and that we are not going through this alone.



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