

Mental health notes. Questions and Comments

Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust staff who took questions and responded to comments:
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A list or resource explaining where worrying can be helpful and where it can be unhelpful would be really useful.

Worry has a lot of negative connotations but it's important to remember that it can actually be really productive and helpful - until it isn't. [see slides]

What are the telltale signs you can see in friends to know that they are under stress or need help?

It's hard to always tell, especially during lockdown when we are not seeing people face to face, but it's really important and all the more so when we lack our normal support structures. We're all individual and all different so there's no catch-all way of telling if people are under stress. If you notice someone 'not being themselves' that is the sign to look out for.

Common signs associated with mental distress include:

- Urge to withdraw
- Feelings of shame
- Fear (this may look like sadness)
- Less contact with other people
- No longer enjoying the things they used to enjoy

Give people the opportunity to let you know that they are not feeling well, but they may not take the opportunity the first time you ask them. Give them some time then you can try again.

In your presentation you say that that we're good at being compassionate to other people but not so good at being compassionate to ourselves. I make befriending calls. I listen to other people but sometimes I forget to look after my own mental health. I agree with your statement.

You can't pour from an empty cup.

During the pandemic we have more time on our hands, more time to think about things. People are having bad memories rise up from years ago, people are feeling unsafe, feeling like they are going crazy.

Yes, we're hearing from people who are having flashbacks and nightmares about traumatic events from their past that they thought they had dealt with years ago. People who have suffered from domestic violence and trafficked women. At the moment we're all trapped in our homes, we can't leave, we're facing an unknown threat and we don't know when it's going to end. We feel powerless and we lack agency, we can feel we're in captivity. These feelings are the hallmarks of trauma so covid can have the effect of retriggering past feelings.

If you find yourself in that situation you should do your best to take actions that help you discriminate between then and now. For example you could say to yourself 'I'm 47 now, then I was 27' or look at photos of yourself with your new partner and children. Also take actions that give you a feeling of agency – go out to the park, do some yoga, connect with friends.

But if flashbacks and nightmares continue you might want to contact your GP for referral to a trauma service.

[Rana - just to add to this response, speaking personally I know I have a lot more on my mind during this period. Patterns of worry and negative recurrent thoughts establish themselves more at this sort of time. There's a tendency when we have a recurrent thought to think 'well it must be true'. In normal times we have more things to do - we have more to distract ourselves and that protects us from these repetitive negative patterns of thought. The mind gets less opportunity to chatter away with repetitive negative ideas but now because we have fewer distractions, there is more time for worry and to dwell more on negative past events.

I went through a phase of insomnia. When you wake up in the middle of the night you have much worse thoughts. In the morning it can be hard to understand why you felt that way. Do you have any practical advice on dealing with insomnia?

A lot of people are awake at night because we're less active during the day at the moment. Don't lie awake for more than 15 minutes trying to go back to sleep. This is stressful and to get to sleep you need to be relaxed. Accept it and do something else

What might help is getting up and doing something non-threatening/non-stressful, like watering the plants, doing some ironing, mindful colouring (you can get colouring books for adults) or reading a book. Go back to bed only when you are tired. Audiobooks and listening to soothing music or meditation apps can also be helpful when you are lying in bed. Have a look at the resources to help with sleep, relaxation and breathing exercises on the Traumatic Stress Clinic website: [Traumatic Stress Clinic | Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust \(candi.nhs.uk\)](https://www.candi.nhs.uk) and YouTube channel: [The Traumatic Stress Clinic - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

It would be good to share NHS self help guides about these subjects

Good idea – we'll check through our resources and share links to them to you via Healthwatch.

My organisation makes a lot of befriending calls to members of our community. A lot of people are willing to talk to us about their mental health. They are quite open. However they won't speak to the GP about their mental health or seek help from a professional. How do we address this?

This is a really interesting issue. How. Do we normalise help-seeking? As a service we need to understand the barriers. Some people don't want to take up time and space. They minimise their own problems.

Some people have had their problems dismissed in the past and that discourages them from seeking professional help. It's great that you are listening and giving people a positive experience of being listened to. That helps people to address their problems.

Also community services need to access people where they are – services need to be reconfigured with more outreach. It's a big topic.

[Vincent – the work you're doing is also an intervention. For many people that's all they need. For many people mental health problems are managed well within families and friendships. These are genuine interventions. Let's not forget that.]

What about children. Are there resources available for children and teenagers? They no longer have their usual routines.

Yes we'll share some of these in the follow up to this meeting.

I sometimes think about my own mental health. Sometimes our clients say things to us that they wouldn't want to say to a GP. People call me and share a lot of detail. It can make me appreciate what I have and be thankful that I'm in a better place.

Sharing resources produced by statutory mental health services with community organisation is a good way to start building trust in services.

How are community mental health services supporting people during lockdown and have there been additional costs?

Our services have absolutely continued. IAPT for moderate and mild problems went online but not entirely so. Services for higher levels of need kept going by phone and face to face because that direct interaction is important.

Yes there have been additional costs but there has been central funding to support issues relating to COVID but that will go at the end of the pandemic.

Staff and service users have adapted to using more technology and we have reached people we have never been able to reach before but we don't want to lose people who don't use digital and we are very aware of the need to support this group as well.

Additional questions that we ran out of time to answer during the meeting:

What is the best advice for recognising problems with mental health due to Covid in yourself and others?

Some degree of fluctuation in our mental health is normal and to be expected at the present time but when difficulties are sustained and do not improve over time (eg 2-4 weeks) then this may be cause for concern.

The sort of distress and behaviours we need to take very seriously are obviously persistent low mood and suicidal thoughts, self-harming, self-neglect; self-isolation (not because of Covid symptoms); severe and persistent problems with sleep and changes in appetite; increased anger and irritability which feel difficult to control; withdrawal; resurgence of pre-existing conditions such as OCD (Obsessive compulsive disorder), PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder) and psychosis; sustained inability to concentrate and perform at work; inability to cope with parenting responsibilities.

Open up to a trusted friend or colleague; speak to your GP if you have concerns to get their opinion if you are concerned about yourself.

Gently inquire with person you're concerned about re what they are experiencing and what if anything helps. Signpost them to resources included in presentation/encourage them to speak to their GP.

I am interested to know the statistics about the mental health of the community. the triggers, issues, reactions to their mental health. Also how they usually identify or realise that they need to contact a professional for a help.

Can't answer re the statistics in Islington specifically – that's for Vincent maybe – but anecdotally we do know that there has been a massive mental health impact. More PTSD, anxiety, depression and a resurgence of pre-existing mental health problems [see the report [The Mental Health Emergency](#) from mind.org.uk]. However some people have been holding off on presenting during the first lockdown with a subsequent surge when lockdown ended and lots of people are now very unwell and needing help.

The message here is that mental health services are operating and people should refer. The Mental Health Foundation has some good tools for thinking about and looking after your mental health – www.mentalhealth.org.uk

My 26 year old daughter is working from home and getting really down not meeting people. What can I do?

Normalise and validate what she is going through. There have been so many losses for young people. They feel they are missing out on career opportunities and opportunities for advancement; opportunities to go travelling; and opportunities to date and meet people to have a relationship with. It can be really lonely and can feel like their youth is slipping away. It's hard to be stuck at home with parents and younger siblings at a time when they would ordinarily be separating and forging their own lives in a really healthy way. Just acknowledging this loss is important.

She may not take well to advice from a parent but you can try to:

- Encourage her to follow a routine which includes getting out of the house every day – walking to work/from work to mark the beginning and end of working day.
- Exercise is critical for mood. She can walk/run or exercise online
- Yoga is brilliant for mental health. There is lot's online: an especially good resource ([Yoga with Adriene](#)) has a focus for everyone – yoga for anxiety, PTSD, depression etc.
- Keep connected with friends with phone calls or video calls not just text messages.
- Look at volunteering opportunities – local foodbanks and other community initiatives. She can meet people this way and feel that she is doing something useful and meaningful.
- Look at the websites for young people – although many are for teens they still have useful guidance for young adults. Here is one which may be relevant for her: [Coronavirus Support Hub | The Prince's Trust response to coronavirus | About The Trust | The Prince's Trust \(princes-trust.org.uk\)](#)