

Minister for Mental Health
Clare Haughey MSP



T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

NHS Board Chief Executives
Local Authority Chief Executives
IJB Chief Officers
Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate
Chief Executive, Scottish Social Services Council

26 March 2020

Dear Colleague,

NHS and Social Care Staff: Mental Health & Wellbeing Support during COVID-19

I am writing to thank you and your teams for your hard work and commitment at this time to meet the needs of people during the pandemic.

I want to note my sincere appreciation for the extraordinary work that health and social care staff in our hospitals and community care settings are doing to protect and care for people in these difficult times. Our workforces always respond professionally in times of need. However the scale of the challenge is unprecedented. We are asking people to work in unfamiliar settings and many will be asked to learn new skills and will be working in new roles. We recognise that many will be personally impacted by the COVID-19 virus. Some will be caring for their own families, some may be at high risk themselves. This is no small ask. Therefore it is absolutely essential that we look after their mental health and well-being.

You will already have local arrangements in place and it is vital that we work with you to maintain these support structures at this time. Valuable work is also taking place across organisations to provide resources and assistance to as many staff as possible. We should all be signposting colleagues to support they can access including through trade unions and professional bodies.

I am leading the work on the health and wellbeing of the Health and Social Care Workforce over this period for the Scottish Government. My officials have been asked to develop an approach to supporting and expanding this work. This is likely to include practical support and messaging which I hope will complement your response and help you as an employer and commissioner of services. Further information will be provided in due course.

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I know you will agree that we need to engage directly with staff at this time. I have attached some key messages, which could be shared at huddles and team handovers or equivalent with immediate effect. Consideration is also being given to the co-ordination of online messaging across the system to ensure as wide a reach as possible.

I am conscious that you and your senior management teams are also facing unprecedented pressures. I would encourage you to also consider your own needs and that of your senior teams, discussing the content of this letter and the key messages with them too.

In the next week I would suggest that you engage your leadership teams in a discussion about how they will implement the key messages in their area, as many of you will I know have already started. I would also suggest that the going home check list, where appropriate, could be implemented for teams and help you. If you have not already, you may want to identify a champion for staff wellbeing locally. Your staff governance committee or equivalent could take on the lead responsibility for positive mental health and wellbeing of the workforce, including practical support, for example on food and accommodation. We will include these issues in the feedback that we will provide to NHS Boards regarding Local Mobilisation Plans.

Thank you again for your extraordinary work.

Clare Haughey

CLARE HAUGHEY

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Mental Health and Wellbeing: Key Messages for Staff

You are likely to be under increased pressure over this period and you will need appropriate support. It is going to be crucial that we are all able to talk openly and honestly about our mental health and wellbeing, and that we have access to the right help and support when we need it. Looking after our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

You Need Care Too

Here are some tips for staying safe and well:

Information and social media

- Get timely, accurate and factual information about COVID-19 from a reliable source no more than a couple of times a day.
- If you are feeling stressed or anxious, consider how you feel when you have constant exposure to media coverage and graphic news stories. Although it is important to stay informed, consider taking a break if you feel things are getting on top of you.

Looking after your basic needs

- Take care of your basic needs at work. Eat and drink regularly and healthily. **Always take regular breaks during shifts.**
- Allow time for sleep, rest and respite between shifts.
- Try and stay as connected to your friends and family as much as possible via technology.
- Maintain, where possible, your normal daily routine and a healthy diet, and get fresh air when you can. Avoid using unhelpful coping strategies that involve alcohol, tobacco or an unhealthy diet.
- Think about creating a consistent routine to ensure you get the amount of sleep you need, but also about ensuring your bedroom is quiet, dark and a relaxing environment to sleep in.

Looking after each other

- Speak to colleagues, line managers and professional leaders, building this into your team's daily huddles and handovers. They may be feeling the same way. It's good to talk. Peer and social support are often the best buffers against stress and adversity.
- Look out for each other and share small successes about what's gone well.
- Be kind to each other. This can have a profound impact on staff wellbeing.
- Use the [Going Home checklist](#), where relevant, to leave work in work.
- It's good to talk, but not all of you will be 'talkers'. That's OK too but make sure you give yourself space to process the events of the day and deal with your feelings.

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Additional information

- It is perfectly normal to feel worried during exceptional times such as these. However, if you are starting to feel overwhelmed, it's important to acknowledge your feelings and speak to someone you trust, whether that's a friend, a family member, or a colleague. A helpline such as NHS24 (shortcode 111) or Breathing Space (0800 83 85 87) may also help.

You may find the following websites of assistance:

[NHS Education for Scotland](#)

[NHS Inform](#)

[Support in Mind Scotland](#)

[Breathing Space](#)

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

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