

You are not *alone*



Dr **Farah Elnaqa**¹ discusses tackling mental health as a team and what we can do for ourselves and each other.

As we gradually ease out of lockdown and normal life slowly resumes, many of us will still be dealing with the effects of COVID-19. Although the lifting of lockdown has been much anticipated, it is likely that it will take some time to reconnect with our 'old life'. Going back to routine may come with some anxiety, especially with the uncertainty that surrounds us and the foreseeable future. New research has found that 67% of dental professionals feel stressed on a weekly basis and 68% feel that their stress and anxiety levels have worsened since the pandemic.¹ At first, it may have seemed that the most difficult aspect of lockdown was staying indoors, but for many of us, the impact it has had on our mental health was unexpected.

GDC standard 6.1 states that 'you must work together effectively with your colleagues and contribute to good teamwork'² and it is important now more than ever to truly put this into practice. So, what can we do to look after ourselves and each other as a team?

Accept your feelings

Your feelings, whatever they may be, are valid. At some point during this time, many of us have dealt with fear, anxiety or grief. These are all normal. Try to acknowledge these emotions, in order to be able to take steps towards processing and tackling them in a healthy way.

Discuss how you feel openly

Many people worry about discussing their feelings due to the stigma surrounding mental

health. But often the way we feel is also shared by others. Talking about your feelings can be one of the most effective ways to preserve a positive state of wellbeing. It can help you feel heard and supported. In fact, speaking about feelings can encourage others to open up too.

Be aware of the symptoms and ask for help

We can all find ourselves feeling overwhelmed sometimes: we are all human. Some early signs that you might be finding things difficult include low mood, tiredness and irritability.³ If you find yourself starting to feel this way, make sure to tell someone, you are not alone. You can turn to a friend, colleague or a professional.

Pace yourself

It can be easy to feel pressured to rush back into regular routines. Although some people prefer to do this, it's important to recognise what works for you and to allow yourself to move at your own pace.

Take regular breaks

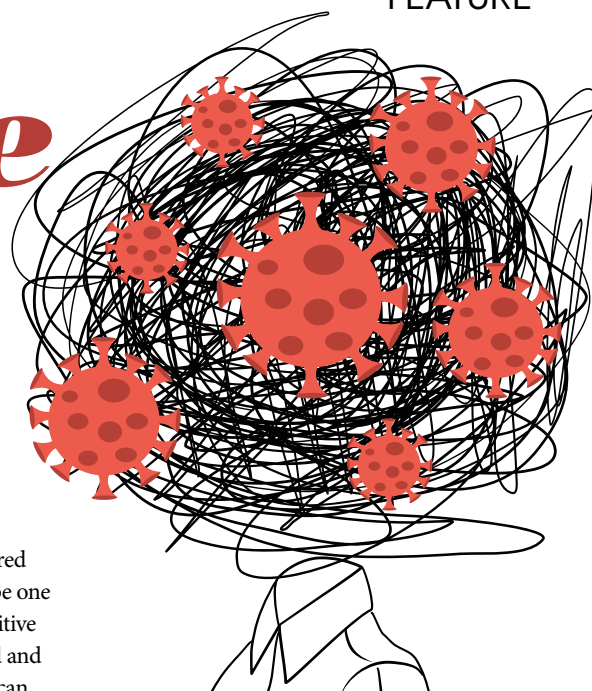
Whether it's five minutes to have a cup of tea or 30 minutes for lunch, make sure you have time during the day to disconnect for a short while. Resist the idea of checking emails or writing referral letters. Take time to be present. Have a chat with colleagues, listen to a podcast or read a book: whatever helps you take your mind off work for a moment and unwind.

Be kind to yourself

This has been a difficult time for everyone and it is important to practise self-compassion. It may be helpful to keep a daily gratitude journal. Allow yourself to feel proud of your daily successes – no matter how small they may seem.

Check in with each other

In times of uncertainty, we work better together. Keep in touch with colleagues, friends and family to help everybody feel connected. Even if it's just taking 30 seconds to send a short text message or to pop your head round the door to



ask how someone is doing. It can make a world of a difference towards helping someone feel supported.

Do things you enjoy out of work

A healthy work-life balance is essential in reducing stress levels. Find the things that you love doing and make time for them! Doing these things regularly can help boost your mood significantly. As important as work is, it is also important to focus on the things in life that make us happy.

References

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