

Mental Health Aspects of Pandemic Flu Preparedness

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Impact on Individuals and Communities

- Economic:
 - Drastic decline in many economic sectors
 - Escalating unemployment
 - Financial difficulties due to closures of businesses and lost work time related to illness or caring for others



Impact on Individuals and Communities

- Supply:
 - Impairment of essential services such as utilities, transportation and communications.
 - Reduced supply of medications, medical care, and hospital beds.
 - Short supply of food, water, and power.



Impact on Individuals and Communities

- Emotional:
 - Reacting to inconsistent information
 - Fear of exposure/infection
 - Massive loss and grief
 - Exposure to traumatic images
 - An inability to see loved ones
 - Not being able to say “good-bye” to those who may die in the hospital or while separated from family.



Impact on Individuals and Communities

- **Social:**
 - Isolation/quarantine (home care)
 - Social distancing (comfort)
 - School dismissal (child care)
 - Closing places of assembly (social support)



Role for Mental Health in Preparing for and Responding to a Pandemic

- Support community professionals
- Increase adaptive behavior
- Promote resilience
- Facilitate recovery from grief



Mental Health Staff

- Define role for MH professionals in supporting community
- Involve MH in trainings/preparation activities
- Design systems of counseling/support provided by MH staff
- Train medical providers



Prepare Systems

- Establish key roles in pandemic response
- Identify core staff
- Decide who can work at home & who can't
- Elicit commitment to fulfill job responsibilities
- Plan for incentives/enforcement if individuals don't want to stay
- Plan for 2-way communication to determine staff needs, concerns before, during pandemic
- Anticipate issues that may limit workforce participation
- Create just-in-time training
- Prepare for surge capacity / mutual aid resources



Increase Adaptive Behavior

Advise people to be prepared:

- A supply of water and food, medications, hygiene supplies, vitamins, fluids, supplies, and food preparation items


Advise people to stay healthy:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Stay at home if you are sick
- Do not rush to the hospital unless absolutely necessary



Promote Resilience: General Interventions

- Disseminate information on self efficacy, social connectedness, calming, safety, and hope.
- Provide guidance about building resilience.
- Create front line community crisis counseling teams (use telemedicine outreach).
- Incorporate hospice and faith communities in community response plans.
- Identify individuals at risk and facilitate access to appropriate mental health services.
- Identify and task local leaders within special/vulnerable population groups to facilitate access to information and resources.




Five Empirically-Supported Intervention Principles:

- Promoting sense of safety
- Promoting calming
- Promoting sense of self- and community-efficacy
- Promoting connectedness
- Instilling hope



Promotion of Sense of Safety

- Biology
- Cognitive processes




Safety Interventions: Public Health

- Educate about how to make environment safe
- Provide an accurate, organized voice to help circumscribe threat
- Inform the media to convey safety and resilience rather than imminent threat.
- Educate parents regarding limiting and monitoring news exposure in children



Safety Interventions: Individual

- Better discriminate between safe and not safe
- Increase sense of safety
- “Grounding techniques” such as reality reminders
- Instruction in contextual discrimination in the face of trauma and loss triggers



Promotion of Calming

- Can reduce trauma-related anxiety that can generalize
- Can reduce high arousal, numbing, or emotionality which can:
 - Interfere with sleep, eating, hydration, decision making, and performance of life tasks
 - Lead to panic attacks, dissociation, PTSD, depression, anxiety, and somatic problems, if prolonged




Calming Interventions: Public Health

- Help people directly solve concerns
- Give information on whether family and friends are safe, and if further danger is impending
- Large-scale community education about the following topics:
 - Reactions that are understandable and expectable.
 - Anxiety management techniques for common problems
 - Signs of more severe dysfunction
 - Limiting media exposure for those with minor to mid-level problems of anxiety
 - Receiving truncated news reports from a friend or family member, for those with more severe emotionality




Calming Interventions: Individual

- Breathing retraining
- Deep muscle relaxation
- “Normalization” of stress reactions to reduce anxiety associated with reactions
- Cognitive Reframing -- changing focus, sense of time, thoughts and beliefs to change reactions



Promotion of Self-Efficacy

- Increases people's beliefs about their capabilities to manage the distressing events, principally through self-regulation of thought, emotions, and behavior



Self-Efficacy Public Health Interventions

- Foster “competent communities”, who:
 - encourage the well-being of their citizens
 - provide safety
 - make material resources available for rebuilding and restoring order
 - share hope for the future
 - support families, who are often the main provider of mental health care after disasters
- Foster the perception that others are available to provide support, which:
 - mitigates the perception of vulnerability
 - emboldens individuals to engage in adaptive activities they might otherwise see as risky



Self-Efficacy Individual Interventions

- Reminding individuals of their efficacy
- Encouraging active coping
- Enhancing sense of control over traumatic stressors
- Helping to “recalibrate” expectations and goals
- Teaching individuals to problem-solve and set achievable goals



Promotion of Connectedness

- Based on research indicating that social support is related to better emotional well-being and recovery following mass trauma
- Increases opportunities for knowledge essential to disaster response
- Provides opportunities for a range of social support activities, including:
 - Practical problem-solving
 - Emotional understanding and acceptance
 - Sharing of traumatic experiences
 - Normalization of reactions and experiences
 - Mutual instruction about coping



Connectedness Public Health Interventions

- Identify those who:
 - Lack strong support
 - Are likely to be more socially isolated
 - Have a support system providing undermining messages
- Help individuals to identify and link with loved ones
- Increase the quantity, quality, and frequency of supportive transactions
- Address potential negative social influences (i.e, mistrust, in-group/out-group dynamics, impatience with recovery, exhaustion, etc.)



Connectedness Individual Interventions

- Train people how to access support in a creative way if social distancing is in effect
- Provide formalized support
- Address discordance among family members




Instilling Hope

- Those who are likely to have more favorable outcomes after mass trauma maintain:
 - Optimism (because they can retain hope for their future)
 - Positive expectancy
 - A feeling of confidence that life and self are predictable
 - Other hopeful beliefs (e.g., in God, that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected)



Hope Public Health Interventions

- Provide services to individuals that help them get their lives back in place
- Develop advocacy programs to aid victims
- Support rebuilding of local economies
- Media, schools and universities, and natural community leaders (e.g., churches, community centers) should help people with:
 - Linking with resources
 - Sharing their experience and hope
 - Memorializing and making meaning
 - Accepting that their lives and their environment may have changed



Hope Individual Interventions

- Identify, amplify, and concentrate on building strengths
- Normalize responses
- Indicate that most people recover spontaneously
- Highlight already exhibited strengths and benefit-finding
- Manage extreme avoidance behavior
- Control self-defeating self statements
- Encourage positive coping behaviors



Normal Grief Reactions

- *Intrusive memories*, coming out of the blue, or reminders that prompt the memories
- *Searching* for the person in your current environment
- *Pining and longing* for the deceased
- *Dreams* about the lost person
- *Mistaking others* for the deceased
- *Visions* of the deceased person, or hearing them calling out to you




Normal Grief Reactions

- *Intentionally reminiscing about* the deceased
- Having both *comforting or disturbing* memories
- *Pushing away or avoiding* memories of the deceased
- Being *tearful or crying* for the deceased
- Feeling *anger* that the person has died
- Feeling that there is something unfinished that you would have liked to have done



Complicated Grief

- Trouble accepting the death
- Inability to trust others
- Excessive bitterness or anger
Uneasy about moving on
- Numbness and detachment
- Feeling that life is empty or meaningless
- Bleak future
- Agitation



Positive Ways to Cope with Grief

- Strengthening social and family ties
- Talking to others about your loss
- Seeking religious or spiritual help
- Counseling
- Writing or creating some personal way to honor the loss



Take-Home Messages

- Mental Health has a place in planning for pandemic and other public health threat
- There are evidence-informed interventions for promoting resilience and recovery
- Multiple modalities and creative adaptations will be necessary for interventions
- Responsibility will fall on all members of the community for promoting recovery
- Interventions must be tailored for the phase and severity of the pandemic



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