Statement

ACMHN statement on support of mental health nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tuesday 21April 2020

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the pre-eminent and authoritative voice of the mental health nursing profession in Australia.

We believe that:

- everyone's mental health is important during the coronavirus crisis
- it is imperative to acknowledge, recognise and support mental health nurses and others who are working in the mental health sector, and
- Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (MHNPs) and Credentialled Mental Health Nurses (CMHNs) have a vital role in the provision of mental health support services recently announced in the Government stimulus package

Keeping the profession informed

As Australia continues to navigate the impact of COVID-19, we look to countries which are ahead of us in both their timeline but also in their ability to report on tried and tested methods for care, failures, research and findings. Therefore it is very important to keep informed from a global perspective as we understand the social and economic impacts that we are facing. In this document we provide some beneficial links that will keep you informed on issues directly impacting Australian mental health nurses.

Supporting mental health nurses

ACMHN acknowledges that our mental health workforce is under pressure to provide specialist care to people who normally require their support as well as people who are experiencing stress and mental health issues because of COVID-19. This places burdens on our health services, as well as the health of our mental health nurses.

Mental health nurses have the knowledge and skills to also provide support to their nursing colleagues from other health care areas during this time of considerable uncertainty and stress for all in the nursing workforce

ACMHN will continue to provide support and information to mental health nurses via its website, Facebook and weekly news updates (http://www.acmhn.org)

In particular, updates regarding our efforts to allow access for MHNPs and CMHNs to access the stimulus funding.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) (https://www.ahpra.gov.au/News/COVID-19.aspx) also provides up to date information for health practitioners as does the Nursing and Midwifery Board Australia (NMBA) (https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/COVID19-guidance.aspx). Also remember nurses have 24/7 access to a free and confidential health support service via NMBA nurse and midwife Support on 1800 667 877. (https://www.nmsupport.org.au/).

Caring for self and others

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has published a mental health and psychosocial considerations document. (https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf).

This document provides invaluable information as do Australian sites such as Beyond Blue (https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/) and the National Mental Health Commission (https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/News/2020/March/COVID19-Mental-Health-Information)

Guidance for practitioners and mental health services

The Australian Government provides multiple resources and regular updates re-COVID-19. These include monitoring the outbreak and appropriate responses. (https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert).They also provide resources and advice specific for health professionals and healthcare managers. (https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-resources-for-health-professionals-including-aged-care-providers-pathology-providers-and-healthcare-managers)

The Australian Government also provides an online COVID-19 Symptom Checker. This tool answers your questions your questions regarding symptoms and then advises if you need to seek medical help or get tested. (https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/healthdirect-coronavirus-covid-19-symptom-checker)

Safe work Australia also provides information about the possible psychosocial hazards from COVID-19 and tips about reducing risks and managing stress. (https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/mental-health-and-covid-19).

Specific individuals and communities

From what we understand, COVID-19 is enhanced in those with compromised immunity or pre-existing conditions. There are also many members of our society that will experience life events during this time which may heighten their need for mental health services. This includes children, older Australians, pregnant women, indigenous Australians and those experiencing family violence. There are anecdotal reports that Googling family and domestic violence services has increased by up to 75 per cent in Australian during the lockdown period, which is of significant concern.

Experienced mental health nurses are well placed to assist specific members of our community during this time.

- Maternity care during COVID-19
- Dementia care during COVID-19
- Impact of COVID-19 on mental health care for Veterans: Improvise, adapt and overcome
- Abused children and partners, people with mental illness are all especially vulnerable with stay- at-home orders from coronavirus

Further links and reading

- The Role of Telehealth in Reducing the Mental Health Burden from COVID-19
- Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Psychological, Behavioral, Interpersonal Effects, and Clinical Implications for Health Systems
- Introducing COVID-19 and acute disturbance
- Psychological interventions for people affected by the COVID-19 epidemic
- Mental health care for medical staff in China during the COVID-19 outbreak
- COVID–19, Mental Health and Aging: A Need for New Knowledge to Bridge Science and Service
- Mental health survey of 230 medical staff in a tertiary infectious disease hospital for COVID-19