

Looking after yourself and others

The global Covid-19 outbreak is having a profound impact on everyone, including people in the veterinary profession. Public health and government advice for some to self isolate and for all of us to increase social distancing poses huge challenges for the industry and its people, as well as clients and patients. Here, Vetlife Helpline manager **Rosie Allister** provides guidance for the veterinary community during this challenging time.



Worry and uncertainty

The World Health Organization's advice for maintaining mental health during the pandemic recommends minimising watching, reading or listening to news that causes you to feel anxious or distressed. Try to seek information updates at specific times during the day, once or twice and from a trusted source. Constant information about a situation where your control is limited can cause worries to increase, as can rumours and misinformation.

Social contact



Social distancing, self isolation and quarantine are important measures for disease control but can have profound impacts for our social contact and connectedness. Being socially connected to other people is key for mental health. Try to maintain and structure in regular contact by phone, video call, social media and other ways that are possible within the restrictions you face. Sometimes when isolated from others we can experience changes in mood and feel more withdrawn and have less desire to be in touch with other people. If you are feeling this way, reach out to others, even though it feels difficult.

Structure



At times of uncertainty, it can be hard to keep structure and routine, both of which can be helpful for mental health. Over recent weeks many vet practices and working environments have rapidly changed the way they work and many people are now spending more time working alone. Keeping to normal timings, routine and maximising opportunities for contact by phone or online can help things to feel normal in uncertain times.

Focusing on control

For individuals: identify aspects of your life and work that you can control and maintain these. Having a sense of control – even over small things – when facing adversity is important.

For employers: communicating a sense of control matters too. Emphasise a sense of safety in your team, they are doing an important job well. Plan, reassure and communicate. Offer extra support to managers and leaders who are



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Study

For many students this is a time of unprecedented uncertainty and disruption. Students who rely on work in the service industry to fund their studies may be facing acute financial hardship. Please talk about your worries and concerns. Students are hugely valued by the vet professions and will make an incredible contribution to the industry after we get through this disruption.



It's important to talk about concerns and worries and not keep them to yourself

Contributing



Generosity, care, consideration and being part of a community, even if its connections are sustained remotely, is good for the health of the giver as well as the receiver. Thinking of ways you can continue to care for others if your working circumstances have changed can help to maintain a sense of contribution and meaning. But remember, animals are bringing people joy, comfort and reasons to keep going in difficulty, and the veterinary profession is key to that.



Self care

As a caring industry facing new pressures, it can be our first instinct to care for others and neglect our own health. But rest, sleep, nutrition and hydration are more important than ever. Sleep and rest are vital for mental health.



Financial challenges

The coronavirus outbreak is an unprecedented challenge for our industry and we know many practice owners have worries about how they will keep running for their staff and the people and animals we help. We know too that many contractors, locums and people who are self employed may be facing immediate financial difficulty, and staff who are unwell or self isolating may also be concerned about their income. It's important to talk about concerns and worries like this and not keep them to yourself.

making the plans and facing organisational pressures. Keep management visible and available if you can, and communicate with regular bulletins. Keep bulletins prompt and consistent and where possible, wait for certainty and decisions before communicating information. Promote peer support and a culture of it being OK to say that you are not OK. Plan small debriefs through the day if staff are working more remotely than usual.

The Vetlife helpline is a confidential service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for support. We use secure methods of remote working so we can remain open despite disruption. Our profession has supported its members through difficult and uncertain times before and we will continue to be here for each other, and for society and the animals we care for, through the Covid-19 outbreak.

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Support for the
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