



Covid-19 pandemic and patient death Ways to cope

A wellbeing support resource
for health care professionals
and students

Prepared by
Tanisha Jowsey, PhD
Centre for Medical and Health Sciences Education



Covid-19 poses a serious threat to people globally. This brochure is for people who have answered the call to working on the frontline of healthcare during this pandemic.

The circumstances you are facing may be shocking and can have a profound effect on you as a health care professional and as a human.

You may be deeply affected with loss, anger, despair, and other feelings.

This resource offers some suggestions for how you can cope with whatever Covid-19 throws at you.

'I could have done something different'

If you find yourself wishing you had taken a different course of action while caring for a patient who subsequently died, it can be a good idea to identify and tell yourself what you have learned from that situation.

Positive affirmations may also help.

e.g. 'I am doing my best under incredibly difficult circumstances. I will continue to try to be of benefit to others.'

Conversations Help

Call a counselling service or clinical psychologist

This may be one provided through your university, DHB or professional college. To look after your own health you could call weekly during the pandemic.

Debrief

You can ask your team leader for a debrief following a clinical event that has left you feeling shaken. A debrief is often a structured conversation to make sense of what happened.

Degrief

You can ask a clinical colleague for a degrief following a clinical event that has left you feeling shaken. A degrief is an unstructured conversation to make sense of and assess what happened.



Call a friend

A trusted friend who understands your clinical context can be invaluable for talking through your experience, feelings and thoughts.

Restless Sleep

Having restless sleep due to ruminating thoughts or intense emotion can leave you feeling frustrated and exhausted when it is time to wake up.

When you recognise that you have been tossing and turning for 30 minutes or more you can try these research-based strategies to reset your system:

- Get up
- Read a few pages of a book
- Drink a cup of warm milk (cow's milk has a mild sedative effect when warmed).
- Do some reflective writing. This might include listing things you are grateful for.
- Go back to bed and do a mindfulness body scan.
- Avoid blue screens and blue light of any kind during hours in which you should be sleeping.
- Put some essential lavender oil on a tissue and put it under your pillow – this has a calming effect.

Material in this brochure has been informed by research evidence. For more information contact: t.jowsey@auckland.ac.nz

Ruminating Thoughts

It is common to experience ruminating thoughts during emergency situations such as those connected with Covid-19. If you feel like your thoughts are circling in an unproductive way, you can try this meditative exercise:

Eight-minute exercise

First acknowledge that you are having those thoughts again. Then go to your safe space in your mind.

'Ah, here I am having those thoughts again. Now I am going to my safe space.'

Your safe space is in your mind that you imagine and create in detail. Your safe space is where you feel happy. Nothing in your safe space can harm you.

Spend eight minutes or so focusing on the details of what your safe space includes.



Photo by Ghislaine Guerin on Unsplash

Wellbeing Activities

These evidence-based strategies may help you to process and move through grief/trauma experiences:

- Exercise
- Reflective writing
- Practice random acts of kindness and compassion (including towards yourself)
- Creative play – try building a rock pyramid. Paint a stone with an image of the sun or the moon or a tree. Get out some paints or coloured pencils and simply colour.
- Watch a light-hearted comedy film with a friend via Zoom
- Meditate – even just for one minute, focus on your breath
- Engage in spiritual or religious activities
- Virtual hug those you love
- Smile and laugh when it feels okay to do so
- Take a few minutes to sit in the sunshine
- Begin a small achievable project that you know you can achieve within a few days. The end product can serve as a reminder of how you got through this time.