

## DEPARTMENT COVID-19 UPDATE #12 - May 1, 2020

*On behalf of Nick Kates, Chair, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioural Neurosciences –*

Today, May 1<sup>st</sup>, is **National Physicians Day**, and I want to thank all of the physicians in our Department for the magnificent way you have responded to the current crisis and for the flexibility, creativity and collegiality that have marked everything you have been doing. We are fortunate to have such a committed group of psychiatrists and residents, and it has been so impressive to see how you have come together and been able to support and assist one other, as well as to watch the extraordinary leadership that many of you have provided. It is deeply appreciated by me, and everyone in the Department.

Today's Update focuses on the **recent survey of Department members**, which asked about how you are coping, supports that you might be looking for and how well the Department is doing in responding to these needs. 109 members of the Department completed the survey, and you will find the findings at the bottom of this email, and also as an attachment.

A number of ideas for improvements were suggested, one of which was to include fewer items in each **Update**, but to bring them out more frequently. So they will now come out twice a week, and I will also start to include other snippets of information about the Department and the achievements of our members, that would otherwise have been covered in the Digest. And as next week is **Mental Health Week**, which has a slightly different meaning for all of us this year, Monday's Update will focus on some of the resources and supports that are available to us.

But I want to begin today by mentioning **our 3<sup>rd</sup>, Virtual Department Meeting**, which will be taking place on **Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>. from 08.00 – 09.00**. We will use this time to catch you up on what has been happening recently, and how we are starting to prepare for what lies ahead, both between now and July 1<sup>st</sup>, and in the coming academic year. The Zoom link will follow and I hope you will be able to join.

Meanwhile, **Our Department Wellness Drop-in Support Group** is going to be meeting every 2 weeks, rather than weekly, and will now take place at 16.00 rather than 7.45, although still on a Tuesday. The next meeting will be on **Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>** at 16.00.

I'd also like to highlight a couple of important items that Paul O'Byrne mentioned in his letter to the Faculty yesterday, in case you missed them.

**The COVID-19 McMaster Survival Guide** is an excellent, concise, comprehensive and easy to use manual on the clinical aspects, diagnostic approach, prevention and management of COVID-19, which can be found [here](#). It includes information on mental health, pregnancy and palliative care in patients with COVID-19 not always found in the other guides.

And as part of **Mental Health Week**, a series of live webinars are being offered to all McMaster employees. These include separate sessions on managing your time and energy; planning for resilience; happiness from home and healthy sleep habits. You can register [here](#).

Last Tuesday, the Department and the AFP jointly organized a well-attended and informative **meeting for physicians to look at the impact of CoVID-19 on physician practice and billings**. I will be circulating a summary of the meeting, along with the plan that is evolving to all physicians early next week.

We also received one important piece of information today from the Ministry of Health, who have now **included an opt out option in their newly announced advance payment program**. To opt out, a physician needs to contact the ministry's Service Support Contact Centre by phone at 1-800-262-6524 or email [SSContactCentre.MOH@ontario.ca](mailto:SSContactCentre.MOH@ontario.ca) and provide their OHIP billing number and request to opt out. The first advance payment is due to be paid on May 15, 2020, so anyone interested in opting out should act quickly to ensure their request is processed in time.

### **The Department Survey of Members**

The findings of the survey are attached and will also be discussed at the Department Meeting. We asked about 4 areas - current level of stress, the value of our wellness drop in group, how the Department was doing in providing support and communicating with our members, and other comments or ideas for other things we could be doing differently.

#### **1. Current Level of Coping and Stressors**

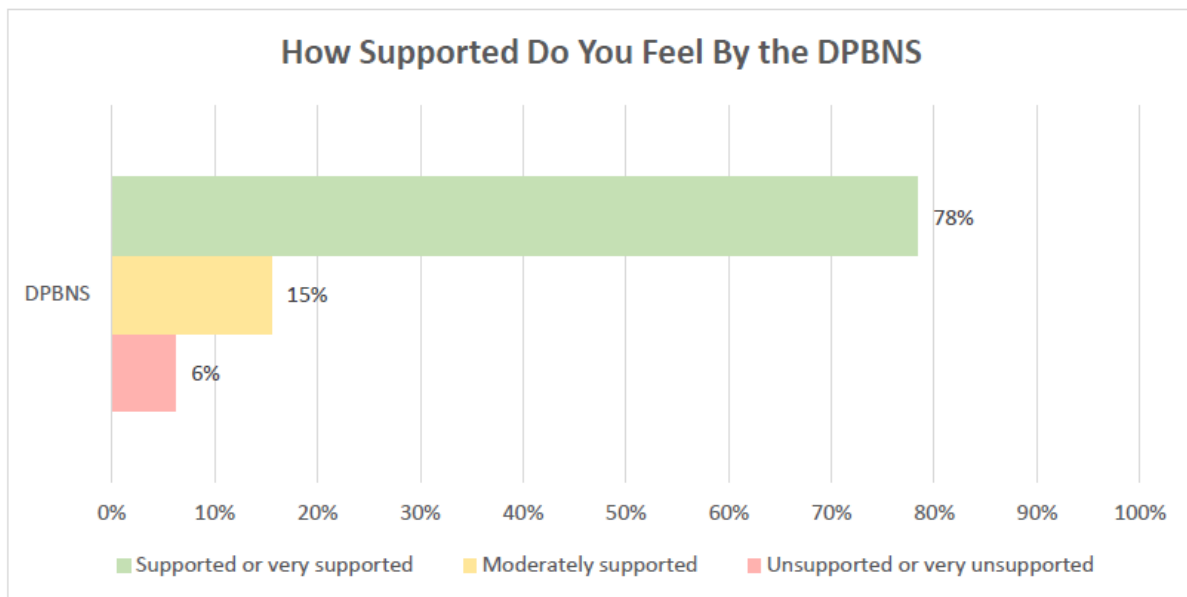
- Current level of coping:
  - Most people in the good (54%; 59) or fair (38%; 41) category
- Top three stressors:
  - Loss of routine/structure: 57% (62)
  - Difficulty maintaining usual levels of productivity: 53% (58)
  - Loss of income: 34% (37)
- Other stressors:
  - Fear of contracting COVID: 30% (33)
  - Loneliness: 26% (28)
  - Fear of passing on COVID: 25% (27)
  - Childcare issues: 18% (20)
  - Impact on academic career progression: 11% (12)
  - Other:
    - Concerns about health and wellbeing of family members
      - Additional care responsibilities
      - Fear for their safety, especially if unable to see them
    - Concerns about own health and wellbeing
      - Lack of physical activity
      - Lack of personal protective equipment (PPE)
    - Difficulty juggling working from home with other responsibilities

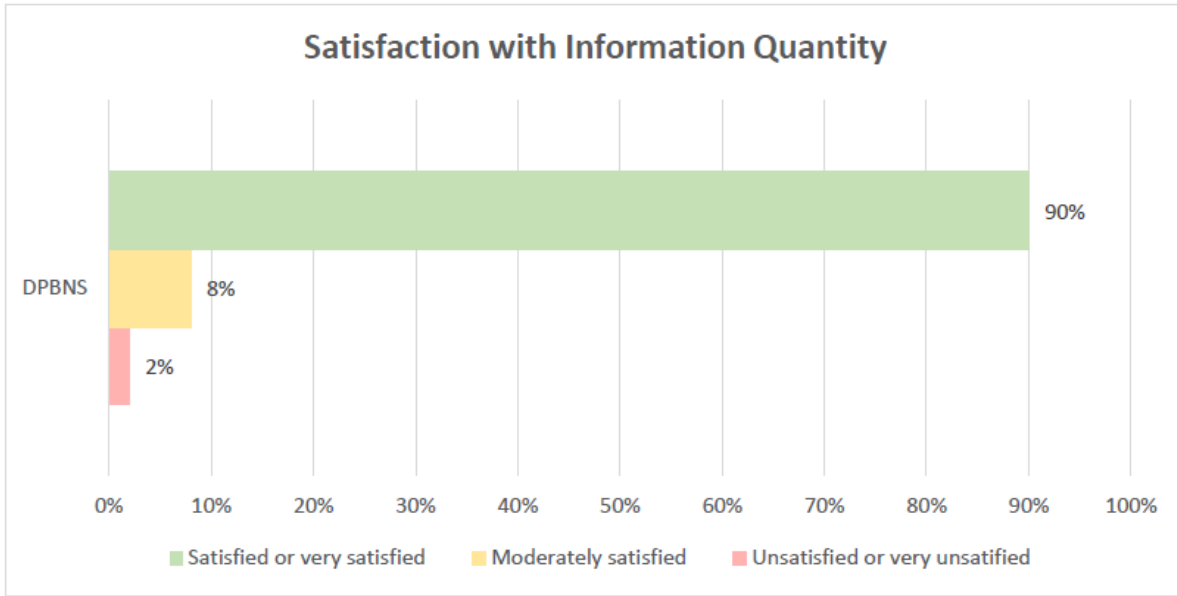
- Feelings of guilt when not being as productive as usual
- Increased workload and meetings
  - Difficulty finding balance
- Impact on patient care
  - Unable to provide patients with the support they need
  - Virtual care feels unsatisfying, tiring
- Anxiety about the future
  - How to safely return to work when there are still active cases

## 2. The role and value of our Department’s Support Group

- Only 14% (15) have attended; 86% (94) have not
- Of those who did not attend, the primary reasons were:
  - Did not need it: 41% (45)
  - Time of day did not work: 35% (38)
    - Early mornings inaccessible to some for a variety of reasons
  - Did not have time: 29% (32)
- Of those who did attend, 87% (13) found the support group helpful or very helpful
  - Accessible to all members of the Department
  - Safe and welcoming environment
  - Helped validate concerns and feel less alone
  - Excellent facilitators

## 3. Perceived Level of Support and Satisfaction with the Department





#### 4. Qualitative Comments (Grouped into Themes)

- Satisfied/Thankful
  - Many participants indicated that the Department has been doing an excellent job communicating and supporting its members during this time
- Clinical
  - Advocate for greater access to PPE
  - Advocate for marginalized patient populations

- Enforce a policy that staff who are not necessary on multiple units only work on one unit to prevent additional exposure and spread
- Communication
  - Hold Departmental meetings during the day, as childcare duties and other commitments can preclude some members from attending in the morning
  - Make updates more succinct or repeat them if they are important – it's easy for information to get lost given the volume
  - Remind people about the Departmental Resources Page
  - Provide information about where to get one-on-one support
  - Provide written updates about the financial aspects of COVID – e.g., how it relates to eligibility for government subsidies, updates from the Ontario Medical Association and Ministry of Health, etc.
- Finances/Human Resources
  - Advocate for physicians around loss of income
  - Concerns that some faculty/staff may lose their jobs
  - Address immediate financial issues facing physicians – e.g., by assisting with income stabilization, forgiving Departmental fees for the year, etc.
- Preparing for the Future
  - Need to start making longer-term plans – e.g., safe return to work under a number of different scenarios
- Other
  - Resolve parking fee issues

### And finally....

On Doctors Day, what better way to finish than with the updated version of “We Rise Again” by Voices of Rock – the Choir of Female Physicians, as seen on Strong Together last Saturday – [video](#).

Nick