

DEPARTMENT COVID-19 UPDATE #11 - April 28, 2020

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

Here is the latest summary of some of the things that have been happening over the last week. One of the highlights was our very productive Q&A virtual Town Hall last Wednesday, when many important and relevant questions were discussed. For those of you who couldn't be there, here is the link [Department Q&A](#), password: 30^2=33!

Department News

Our Website

Our COVID-19 webpage has now been revised and can be visited [here](#). Thanks to Alison Kerkhof, Lisa Kennedy, Bev Pindar-Donick, Karen Saperson, Sheila Harms and to all the members of the Wellness Working Group.

A CIHR Research Grant

McMaster's **Margaret McKinnon** and Western's **Ruth Lanius** have been awarded a \$990,000 grant over three years from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to test a new approach to treating public safety personnel who experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is a cognitive remediation strategy called "Goal Management Training". Full article [here](#).

Psychiatry Rounds (message from Bruno Losier)

It has been a while since we last had the opportunity to gather together to enjoy our weekly presentations, so the rounds committee has been developing a plan to provide the faculty with a weekly, virtual presentation. Beginning the first week of May, an email reminder and link will be sent out directing faculty to the department website for an opportunity to view the selected presentation for that week, which you can view at your leisure. It is the committee's hope that this activity will fill the void until we can meet again, hopefully in the not too distant future.

Education

Support for Graduate Students

The federal government has announced proposed funding to aid post-secondary students during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Canada Emergency Student Benefit will include payments of \$1250/month from May to August for qualifying students, aid packages for expiring scholarships, fellowships, and grants, an expanded student loan program, and opportunities for summer work. More information can be found through [University Affairs](#).

MiNDS Students

Over the past two weeks, **Melissa Kimber** and **Jane Foster** have been surveying the MiNDS students to determine if they would like one-on-one support surrounding COVID-19 related issues (e.g., impact on timelines; anxiety) from a faculty member other than their supervisor. A significant number of students have requested this assistance, which is now being provided. If other graduate students in our Department would like to access this one-on-one support, please contact Melissa (kimberms@mcmaster.ca) or Jane (jfoster@mcmaster.ca) at any time.

Letter from the President

On April 22, McMaster's President, David Farrar, wrote a letter to the McMaster Community outlining current plans for the Fall Term. Present plans focus on remote learning environments but hope remains for a return to normal operations. David's letter can be found [here](#).

Research

Letters to the Research Community

On April 23, McMaster's Vice President Research, Karen Mossman, wrote a letter to the McMaster Research Community describing efforts underway to address the impact of COVID-19 on research at McMaster, and the initiation of discussion about the gradual and safe return to McMaster. Karen's letter can be found [here](#).

For further COVID-19 related updates from Research St. Joe's, please see <https://research.stjoes.ca/covid-19>

The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS) and CanCyber have issued warnings about active malware attacks against health care organizations and researchers. The attacks are sophisticated and considered severe. More info can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 Funding Opportunities

The VPR's office at McMaster has created a webpage summarizing all current COVID-19 related funding opportunities, including the latest updates from CIHR, the [COVID-19 May 2020 Rapid Research Funding Opportunity](#) and from NSERC, the [NSERC Alliance COVID-19 grants](#). This important website can be found [here](#).

CIHR have posted a pre-announcement to alert the research community about two upcoming competitions focused on building and synthesizing our current knowledge base surrounding mental health and substance use response to COVID-19 and to identify relevant interventions. This will be an expedited competition and the pre-announcement can be found [here](#).

McMaster has created the [McMaster COVID-19 Research Fund](#) to which it will contribute up to \$2.5M, along with additional funding provided through the generosity of donors, to support a broad range of research that will aid society in dealing with pandemics in the immediate and longer term. NOIs are due May 4th and full applications are due May 15th.

Clinical Services – Universal Masking

Both HHS and St. Joseph's have implemented Universal Masking protocols, so everyone must wear a surgical mask as soon as they enter any of their buildings. A daily mask will be distributed at the staff entrance, unless you arrive with your own surgical mask, and it must be kept on while you are in the building unless you are alone in an office or protected by a plexiglass barrier. When the mask is off, it should be stored in your own plastic container. Instructions for taking it

on and off are [here](#). If you will be in a clinical area where you must put on additional protective equipment, you will need to store your daily mask to wear to leave that area.

Physician Billing Support

This link outlines the Ontario Ministry of Health's decision to provide an advance to physicians in May June July, which they will claw back starting November. The main point is that this is an "opt out" initiative, in that every physician will get the advance unless they take active steps to opt out. <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/ohip/bulletins/4000/bul4754.aspx>

In the Media

[CBC.ca London](#), [The London Free Press](#), 92.9 FM and 1290 CJBK radio reported on funding for the new grant that **Margaret McKinnon** and **Ruth Lanius** have received.

Peter Bieling, **Maxine Lewis**, **Randi McCabe**, and **Margaret McKinnon** conducted a Zoom media interview with the Spectator to talk about the anxiety, burden, and stresses associated with COVID-19. [Full article](#).

Boris Sakic spoke to the Globe and Mail about how COVID-19 could lead to neurological problems in some individuals. [Full article](#).

Ryan Van Lieshout had an article on managing postpartum depression in the midst of a pandemic reprinted by Halifax Today. [Full article](#).

Ryan, along with other perinatal psychiatrists from Toronto, was interviewed as part of CPMHC's (Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative) *#NowMoreThanEver* campaign. Their article, COVID-19: Why Maternal Mental Health Matters, can be found [here](#). Ryan also spoke with CKTB am10 in St. Catharines on the same issue. [Full story](#).

Zena Samaan's pilot project looking at 50 patients hospitalized for suicidal behaviour who received house calls so they would feel connected rather than abandoned during COVID-19 highlights the Seniors Mental Health inpatient service at West 5th. [Full article](#).

Bernice Downey published a letter to our Indigenous partners in the McMaster News. [Full article](#).

Support Activities

Sabina Nagpal is starting a group on Tuesday nights 20.00 EST **for women physicians across Canada** as a way of bolstering resilience during COVID. If you are interested in finding out more, or participating, contact Sabina at sabinanagpal@gmail.com

Alan Eppel has set up a **Zoom psychotherapy learning group** for faculty, clinicians and students and focusing mainly on psychodynamic, attachment, experiential and emotion focused approaches, to keep people connected during the lockdown. There are two time slots, **Tuesdays**

from 1600 to 1730 and Wednesdays from 1900 to 2030 and participants can attend either or both. For Zoom details or more information contact Alan Eppel at eppela@mcmaster.ca

The Department's Wellness Drop-in Discussion Group continues to meet **every Tuesday at 07.45**, and all members of the Department are welcome to drop in. Zoom details are circulated each Monday.

The Employee Wellness Team at SJHH is committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff and physicians affected by CoVID-19. It offers low-barrier, rapid access to a mental health clinician from the MHAP program at SJHH. Access involves connection, support, and help accessing other resources if needed. This service is also available to staff and physicians at HHS as well as University staff working at either hospital.

Staff from SJHH can access this service by completing a brief form found on the Employee Wellness Page on MyStJoe's. Staff from HHS can access this service through a low barrier self-referral option via Connect. And if you are interested in assisting on this team, please contact Karen Rowa krowa@stjosham.on.ca

Virtual Yoga

Natalie Raso (PGY4), a certified yoga instructor, has kindly offered to host another virtual yoga session this upcoming **Sunday, May 3rd at 11:00am**. No prior experience is necessary! All you need is a mat/towel and a device to connect to Zoom. The class will run for about 35-45 minutes and is the perfect way to foster some zen and wellness and refresh before the week ahead.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/97370613297?pwd=R1BoV1U0Y0YyOWM0aWJlQjNIYmNpZz09>

Dial in: 647 558 0588

Meeting ID: 973 7061 3297

Password: 954195

And finally.....

Something a little different to finish on today. As more and more members of our community find themselves struggling with the financial consequences of the pandemic, all of our Local Food Banks are looking for donations. I want to highlight one of these organization, which provides an extensive range of treatment, support and housing programs to people living with mental health problems across Hamilton and has worked closely with our clinical services for many years, and that is **Good Shepherd**.

Their shelters are filled to capacity, and they are asking for canned and non-perishable food items and unopened hygiene products for use in their shelters, and are accepting drop-offs of food from Monday to Friday between **8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. at the Venture Centre, 155 Cannon Street East**. They can no longer accept clothing as volunteers cannot safely sort them at this time. You can also donate at <https://www.goodshepherdcentres.ca/covid19/donate.html>

Stay well.

Nick