

MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT CAN YOU DO?



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Bio: Dr. Allister is manager of Vetlife Helpline. She qualified from Liverpool vet school in 2005 and completed an MSc in Public Health Research at The University of Edinburgh as well as spending time in practice. Her PhD looked at mental health, support and identity at the transition to practice. She has been researching mental health and wellbeing in the veterinary profession for 13 years.

The global COVID-19 outbreak is having a profound impact, including on people in the veterinary industry. Public health and government advice for self-isolation and for all of us to increase social distancing poses huge challenges for our industry and its people, as well as the clients we support and the patients we care for. With this uncertainty, restriction and change, we see challenges for our mental health.

10 Tips:

1. *Reduce worry and anxiety where you can*



Minimise watching, reading or listening to news that causes you to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates only ones or twice, at specific times during the day, from a trusted source. Resist constant updates and checking which can increase anxiety and distress.

2. *Maintain social contact*



Being socially connected to people is key for mental health. **Try to maintain and structure in regular contact to people dear to you by phone, video call, social media, and other ways that are possible within the restrictions you face.**

3. *Keep to a routine structure*



Over recent weeks many veterinary practices and working environments have rapidly changed their working practices and many of us are now spending more time working alone. **Keeping to normal timings, maintain a routine** even if it is an adapted one, and keep in safe contact with people.

4. *Self-care: rest and sleep enough*



Rest, sleep, nutrition and hydration are more important than ever. To care for others we also need to care for ourselves. Adapting to change and feelings of vulnerability place significant demands on us. Prioritise sleep and rest where you can.

5. *Focusing on what you can control*



Identify aspects of your life and work which you can control – even if small - focus time each day on these.

6. Take extra care of your staff



These are challenging times. Emphasise a sense of safety and solidarity in your team. Support staff safety through the right resources, equipment and protections. Keep staff updated with regular bulletins but await decisions where you can communicate with clarity. Plan regular small debriefs for staff working remotely. Keep in regular contact, promote peer support and a culture of it being OK to say that you are not OK.

7. Make allowance for circumstances



Although our industry is facing this together, individuals also face their own challenges in their unique situations with health vulnerabilities, financial insecurity, isolation, and previous experiences of adversity. **Look out for colleagues, offer support and if you are struggling, do not hesitate to call out and ask for help.** You are not alone.

8. Financial challenges: we are in it together



This is a financially challenging time for most veterinarians. Client visits often have reduced greatly, and many practice owners have worries about how they will keep running their practice and their staff. Also many self-employed veterinarians are facing financial difficulty? **It's important to talk about concerns and worries** like this and not keep them to yourself. You are not alone, we are all in this together!

9. Focus on contribution and meaning



As veterinarians, we want to help and some of us may experience frustration at having aligned clinical knowledge but being unable to be on the clinical frontline in a human health emergency. Maintaining day to day meaning in our roles may feel challenging at times through this, but it is vital. We know that as well as the contributions veterinarians in some roles can make to frontline efforts to combat the outbreak, that maintaining food production and supporting the lives of people who rely on their animals are vital at times of trouble. Animals bring people joy, comfort and reasons to keep going in difficulty, and **we all have a role and can help.**

10. Reminder: together come out of it stronger



In the veterinary world, we have faced many disease outbreaks before, with all the challenges and difficulties attached. However, we also learned from previous outbreaks that **we are a strong and resilient profession who adapt in times of difficulty**, and that we are strongest when we are working together and supporting each other.

For more information and lots of helpful resources: check out the Vetlife website:

<https://www.vetlife.org.uk/how-we-help/vetlife-helpline/>

Or her blog: <https://veterinarywellbeing.wordpress.com/>

Or via twitter: @RosieAllister