Degrees of sanity: the mental health of students post-COVID

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Who am I?
What I will cover today... the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘how’

- Think about- what you and your team might need to do in the medium/ longer term to support student mental health

- What practical steps you might take now to be ready for life and work in a ‘post COVID19’ world.

- How will you support your students and staff, and what issues might be top of your ‘to do’ list?

- How might mental health challenges have changed?

- Will some students need more help than others?

- And what new skills/ services be helpful for life in a changed society?
A word about uncertainty...

- **The issue:**
  - Mismatch between expectation and reality
  - Leads to anxiety, and even self-harmful behaviour (Appleby)
  - Bigger disconnect between school and university this year? Imposter phenomenon worse?
  - Disproportionate fear of COVID v actual risk
  - Don’t feel in control of future or mental health (UCL)

- **The strategy?**
  - Help them to ‘Take Back Control’ (‘plan what you can’)
  - Teach them- ‘When things feel out of control- educate yourself’
  - Need for clear communication/ info *Clarity is Key*
  - Clear expectations of people
  - They like facts- give them factual info!

John Allen Paulos, US Mathematician
At risk groups- adverse MH impact- Direct v indirect

- Bereaved
- Recovering from severe COVID19
- Chronic physical health conditions / disability
- Disrupted health care
- Pre-existing mental health conditions/ disability
- Living in outbreak hotspots
- Estranged/ care leavers
- Carers
- International
- Isolated / face to face social deprivation (impact in adolescence)
- Poor access to IT/ online services
- Healthcare/ frontline workers/ students
- Low income/ financially vulnerable- graduates facing unemployment
- Victims of Intimate partner violence
- Victims of COVID related racism
- Missed year abroad/ year in industry/ placements
Changing emotions

- Bereavement/ loss
- Guilt
- Trauma
- Trust
- Fear of others - threat perceived?
- Powerless/ helpless
Changing behaviours

- Risk aversion
- Loss of confidence
- Sleep
- Eating/ food patterns
- Addictions
- Alcohol/ substance use
- Relationships
- Isolation
- Motivation
- …long term impact…
Impact on specific disorders

- Anxiety/ OCD
- Mood- depression/ bipolar
- Trauma - PTSD (flashbacks)
- Addiction/ misuse
- Eating disorders
- Self-harm/ suicidality (Safety planning?)
Long term impact... graduating in a recession

- Recession graduates have a roughly 6% increase in a generation’s age-specific mortality rate.
- Cohorts coming of age during the deep recession of the early 1980s suffer increases in mortality that appear in their late 30s and further strengthen through age 50.
- Mortality driven by causes such as heart disease, lung cancer, and liver disease, as well as drug overdoses.
- Recession graduates were less likely to be married, more likely to be divorced, and more likely to be childless.
- Plan-> social connections/ careers advice/ hardship funds? -> “Recession proof” your graduates
Planning ahead

- Creating a ‘community’ post COVID?
- Use google search terms trends- predict needs? (suicide/ depression)
- Avoid/ reduce COVID related stigma
- Identify at risk groups-> additional support
- Ongoing review of online/ remote support provision (apps/ helplines/ phone/ video) *screen fatigue??*
- NHS access/ pathways- disruption?
- New services/ specialist therapies/ targeted group work/programmes eg DBT/ bereavement/ trauma/ sleep/ guilt/ graduating in a recession?
- Partner with other teams eg SU/ 3rd sector/ peer 2 peer/ housing/ mentors/ academic
- Training required for different workload?
- Create a reading list for colleagues?
Activity- per ‘theme’ or topic- for team or you?

- Update/ reading needs
- Upskilling needs
- Training needs
- Service plan and delivery needs
“We need to resist the ever-increasing, opportunistic, commercial influence for miraculous cures in the form of pills, or unevaluated apps, and pursue systems that prioritise good health for all and “Building Back Better” in collaboration with national governments, local governments, funders, and global organisations.

Historically, claims to “quick fix” solutions in global health have led to unethical excess costs and suffering.

It is time to urgently invest, instead, in meeting our fundamental and complex human needs.”
Summary

- Identify at risk students
- Be aware of medium and long term impact of COVID19/ recession
- Be aware of risk/ disorders
- Plan service delivery- focus/ need
- Plan training needs/ staff
- Strengthen your communities
- Don’t rely on quick fixes!
- Take advantage of opportunity to Build Back Better?
Thank you!

Questions?

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References/ further reading

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