



Society for HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Many primary care clinicians report they are feeling alone in dealing with COVID. Many express feeling left "hung out to dry." They feel a sense of responsibility to fulfill the needs of a community - to continue the mission that motivated them to choose primary care in the first place. At the same time, the size of that task - and the lack of emotional and financial support, coupled with fears of becoming infected, are taking a huge toll. Many feel torn between a desire to "get out" of medicine altogether, and a sense of duty to serve.

How can a primary care clinician choose a path forward in the context of intense uncertainty and competing demands?

- Focus on the small wins - the encounters where you have been able to help someone. Sometimes that help is medical intervention, but other times it's healing by bearing witness, offering support and simply "being there" for another person.
- Accept your limitations - it is simply not possible to meet the community need right now. Pay attention to your own level of well being, and when your emotional pain and exhaustion impacts your daily functioning, realize it is ok to step back and seek support for yourself.
- Prioritize the "way station" - we all realize COVID-19 is a marathon, not a sprint. But, even in a marathon you know where the finish line lies, and where you are relative to that finish line. Right now, no one knows where the COVID 19 finish line is, so it is difficult to know how to pace yourself. In this context, the best you can do is check in with yourself and the people you care about on a regular basis. Be honest with yourself and others about how you're doing. *Give* support on your "good days." *Take* support on your "bad days."
- Take time to do things that in the past brought you joy and relaxation. It's easy for those to drop off when you're burnt out and depleted. These are the times you need it the most. Perhaps it's exercise, especially outdoors (hiking, biking, swimming, etc). Stream a movie or a series, preferably a comedy. Have a very safe, socially distanced picnic with friends. Garden. Sculpt. Write. Be with people who bring you joy.

If you realize that the emotional toll is too much - your functioning is impaired, you feel unable to continue - seek help from a skilled psychotherapist who has experience and understands the life of a clinician. Then tell us how it goes in a future survey.

National Suicide Hotline 1-800-273-8255

SAMHSA Treatment Referral Helpline: 1-977-SAMHSA7 (1-877-726-4727)

American Psychological Association Therapist Locator: <https://locator.apa.org/>

Psychology Today Therapist Locator: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

Many health care systems now have a wellness team for clinical providers; others offer Employee Assistance Programs. It may be helpful to consult with your Human Resources Department or look on your employer's website to learn more about these resources.