

EDUCATION BULLETIN #1 March 20, 2020

PHYSICIAN WELLNESS DURING COVID-19: THE BASICS

Content Attribution

Well Doc Alberta has reviewed, synthesized, adapted, and added to information from the following three sources. Please consult these sources if you want more information.

- [EMOttawa](#)
- [American Psychiatric Association](#)
- [US Department of Veteran's Affairs – National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#)

Bulletin development: Alicia Polachek, Program Manager, Well Doc Alberta

Bulletin review: Jane Lemaire, Physician Lead, Well Doc Alberta

What is the Impact of COVID-19 on Physicians?

The full impact on physicians is not known. However, infectious disease outbreaks may lead to:

- Increased work demands and stress on top of usual healthcare delivery
- Insomnia
- Safety concerns for self and family members
- Increased alcohol and/or tobacco use
- Somatic symptoms such as reduced energy and/or aches and pains
- Acute illness
- Scapegoating
- Feelings of isolation and stigmatization
- Fear and feelings of constant vigilance regarding infection control
- Dehydration and exhaustion as a result of wearing protective equipment

It's normal to be worried. In particular, as a physician, you may have concerns about:

- How to ensure proper safety precautions
- Whether you will need to make difficult decisions like having to ration healthcare resources if the system is strained
- How you and the healthcare system can keep up with the increasing demands
- Whether you may get sick or transmit the illness to your family members
- How you can continue to support your patients and families if you have to isolate or get sick

Well Doc Alberta

Shaping the future of physician wellness, together

What May Help?

- **Stay informed**, but don't overload on news or social media. You may want to turn off notifications or reduce time on social platforms.
- **Rely on credible sources** for your information in order to keep updated, such as the [Government of Canada](#); [Government of Alberta](#); [Alberta Health Services](#); [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#); and [World Health Organization](#).
- **Accept that many aspects are out of your control**. Focus on the things you can control and remember that there is a great deal of uncertainty right now.
- **Be patient and tolerant**. This includes being patient with yourself and with others. Everyone is doing their best in these challenging times, and extra tolerance right now can go a long way. Remember that even if you feel you're not doing enough, your contributions do make a difference.
- **Anticipate and plan for stress reactions**. It's normal to experience stress and fear during infectious disease outbreaks. Know what the signs are and have strategies in place for addressing these feelings, such as seeking support, practicing deep breathing, or engaging in physical activity when possible.
- **Remember to take care of your basic needs**. Eat well, hydrate, take breaks, and get rest. It will likely be challenging, but if you're not well, you won't be able to take care of your patients. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish, it's necessary.
- **Have a plan in place**. This includes planning and practicing how you will respond in the workplace, as well as how you will respond if you or a family member get sick and have to self-isolate. Knowing how you will respond may help alleviate the stresses of the unknown.
- **Remember that you're not alone**. Seek out support. Remind yourself that you're part of a team of physicians and other healthcare workers doing this important work. And remember that the [Alberta Medical Association's Physician and Family Support Program](#) is available 24/7. Other resources are also available on our [Well Doc Alberta website](#).