

This week is MH awareness week; a time when we should be mindful of our own wellbeing and that of those around us.

It also falls during a time of considerable stress, when all life's certainties, which usually keep us grounded and safe, feel fragile and far away.

I wonder, is it enough to be MH aware for 1/52 weeks?

The theme of this MH week is kindness, which seems so basic and yet if you think carefully about it, is incredibly important, because what is a community other than a group of people being kind and supportive to each other through difficult times? And I believe that the Bailiwick of Guernsey is a true community.

Firstly we need to be kind to ourselves, consider what in our lives is positive which we need to do more of and what is less so and should be minimised.

We are social beings and human connection is important. Talk to people, especially if you are struggling. You will find that talking through your problems with someone, even if they don't have the answer, will help. Seek out the people you know who have a positive effect on you.

If you are worried about the virus, find out the facts from a reliable source, but don't overexpose yourself – watching hours on TV and searching the internet is not helpful or healthy.

Do the things that you are helpful for your physical health as these all help with your wellbeing – make sure you are getting enough sleep, eat well, watch your alcohol and ensure you get exercise.

In lockdown the days merge into one another, especially for those who are furloughed or working/schooling at home. Make sure that you have meaningful, positive structure to your days. Be clear with yourself when you are working or schooling and when the time is your own and use this time positively – contact friends and keep up with activities which you normally enjoy.

Then there are the people we care about – we should always be kind to them, but we know that we are not. We should try harder.

Then there are strangers – kindness to or from them maybe means the most.

Being kind to others makes us feel positive and good about ourselves as well as having a positive impact on those receiving our kindness.

Being cruel or unpleasant, whether in person or on social media, is always negative, unhelpful and toxic to all parties.

The Bailiwick of Guernsey is a cohesive and kind community. I know that many of our staff including myself have been really touched by acts of kindness from all across the community – the weekly clap, the gifts sent to hospital, but perhaps the most touching is when patients, who are really struggling, take the time to ask about how we are and thank us for our time.

We are entering a new phase in the management of this pandemic and people are responding in different ways, all of which are valid and understandable. Some are keen to move forward and get back to normal as soon as possible, some want to move slower than the recommended rate and some want to pause completely until there is certainty that we are at no risk at all. Individuals need to be supported to move forward at a rate which is acceptable to them, but we must move forward.

There is no life without risk and if we try and avoid all negatives we will prevent the possibility of positives.

An update from MHS, although there was a reduction in referrals for the first month, as was seen with every speciality, over the last few weeks, there has been a marked increase in numbers being referred into our service. These referrals are not specifically Covid related, but often have some link with the current situation. There are many indirect effects of the virus – social isolation, employment and financial concerns, increase stress on relationships and an escalation in substance use, all of which negatively impact on our wellbeing.

Our inpatient wards are busy with people who are acutely unwell and the level of risk across the community has risen.

We hope that as lockdown eases, not only will the stress levels on the population decrease, but we will also be able to open up all parts of our service to cater for the current need. However the return to normal will be a challenge and people will need different levels of support from those around them to enable them to complete this transition.

Like many other States departments and businesses in the private sector, the return to normal will be complicated and the phrase new normal will apply. We will be looking at potential lessons from the last few months and also need to be aware that finances may be stretched over the next few years. We all have a responsibility to use the resources that we have in the most effective and efficient way, with consideration that demand for our service may well increase.

From the recent Wellbeing Survey, a number of people have found that the new working patterns established in lockdown, suit the far better and reduce previous work related stress, whilst they continue to be as productive. If this is the case, they may wish to discuss similar flexible arrangements with their employer in the longer-term.

Perhaps during this time, every week should be MH awareness week and kindness should be compulsory – but then it would have less meaning.