

I am here as a representative from the Mental Health and Adult Disability Services to give an overview of what is happen in our services and what we have observed in the population.

Our Service are open and working, albeit in a slightly different way to keep all parties safe. We are busy, but not completely overwhelmed. There has been no reduction to the services for those in acute need.

Like all the other parts of the health service, from the start of this process we have been planning for the worst, whilst hoping for the best. We have also been aware that mental health staff could be re-deployed to help in the acute environment. To this end, half of our doctors went on the intensive care induction in case they were need, which we are all relieved has not been the case.

We are all part of one team and our services are in close liaison with our hospital and community colleagues and regularly takes advice from the Public Health department about issues which arise.

In terms of our current functioning:

Healthy Minds, which is the primary care psychology team, that delivers talking therapies to those with mild to moderate mood disorders continue to work with existing clients and are accepting referrals as usual – either from GP or person themselves. They are all working remotely and supporting individuals via telephone or Microsoft Teams – secure system similar to Skype.

Secondary Mental Health Services covering all ages which includes Drs Clinics, talking therapies and community teams continue to engage with all of our existing clients via whatever means is most appropriate, including seeing people who are in isolation face to face using PPE if necessary. Our wards are all open, Covid free and busy, but not full.

We are accepting new referrals for urgent and emergency cases (where there is risk involved). For routine referrals, we are asking that GPs continue to manage these cases until the time of lockdown is over and then consider if a referral is appropriate.

All of the different parts of HSC MHS have been aware of the potential impact on both our population as a whole and high risk groups such as those with existing mental health problems and our front line staff.

When we went into initial lockdown, we formed a psychological health cell to share experiences across the service. We have a dedicated, senior member of staff from HM, 2 care or OH allocated to different areas – public messaging, hospital, HSC community, private community staff. We have reached out to the various sectors and have supported individuals and groups of staff who have been negatively impacted by their experience working with Covid patients.

People have been asked me how the population has been affected by the lockdown. I have to say that I think that the vast majority of the population is coping really well and this is in no small part due to the trust they have in the people sat with me today.

Professionally and personally my experience is that it is difficult to predict how an individual will be affected by both the lockdown and potential threat we are facing.

Some of the individuals our service were most concerned about, for example people living alone with mental illness are doing really well and some who have been stable for years are struggling. The effect is unpredictable, which is why it is important that we all check in with those we know and care about on a regular basis.

The things which people have found particularly difficult are the isolation, uncertainty regarding the current and future situation and breaking of their normal structure/routine. More recently, we have seen people worried about moving out of lockdown and the potential risks.

CAMHS describe a mixed picture. Emergency/urgent referrals have increased. They have seen more risk presentations of self-harming behaviours and an increase in our young people expressing suicidal thoughts. CAMHS are offering ongoing services to all those open to CAMHS -many are saying that they miss school and contact with their peers.

However some families and young people seem to be actually thriving in the lockdown. Those with autistic spectrum condition and those who are socially anxious often struggle to get into school and are finding that the current climate actually suits them better. They may experience an increase in their distress and mental health difficulties when lockdown lifts.

It is important to acknowledge that being worried is normal and in fact helpful as it will motivate us all to follow the advice which Dr Brink and her team are giving which has been so successful in dealing with the Corona virus.

I also think we need to really consider how lucky we are in Guernsey. We are dealing with a virus which puts people in intensive care and are surrounded by other jurisdictions where politicians are scoring points off each other at the cost of their population's health. But in Guernsey we have a director of public health who is an expert in viruses, a medical director who is an anaesthetist and politicians who are willing to work together and take expert advice, without interest in political gain. That is pretty perfect combination.

Check in with each other, support each other and if you are struggling remember that we are still open. You can self-refer to Healthy Minds or see your GP who can think with you whether you need support from primary care or secondary.