

## Program Director – Best Practices for Supporting Wellness During COVID

### Communication

Clear, streamlined and transparent communication with your trainees is key right now. Given the speed with which things are changing, it also needs to be frequent. Some specific recommendations:

- Strongly recommend that they read the new single WU/BJC command center communication each night and that they review any new policy updates included
- A daily email with collated, summary information that is relevant to your specific program is useful – it is useful to summarize in brief bullet points the components of the WU/BJC command center email that they need to pay attention to. Sharing fun photos or other inspirational/mood lifting things in these emails is very helpful.
- Email alone is not generally sufficient – provide opportunities for group conversation and updates at least once per week. These can be done via Zoom. In addition to providing a chance for questions to be asked and answered in a group – it creates opportunity for your whole group to connect
- Be open and honest about what you do and do not know, and offer to get information for the things you cannot answer and provide an update in a timely fashion (even if the update is that you still don't know)
- Reassure them that hospital and Wash U leadership are invested in their health and well-being and they are at the forefront of their thoughts and decisions. These folks are working long hours, 7 days a week, to come up with comprehensive plans.
- Please send your questions and concerns to GME for assistance in getting answers. We will advocate for you and your trainees.
- Make sure they know to ask if they have questions or are uncertain! We do not always do this well in medicine. But especially if they are doing consults or working in different places in the hospital and are unsure about the recommendations there or have concerns about safety, ask someone!
- Provide a forum for trainees to provide their ideas to help with the current crisis, as there are many great minds amongst the house staff who will provide a new perspective on the matter.
- Help them with resources for communicating with patients and families. Some helpful ones can be found here: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13LEU-dHr\\_fjhpXMACqHokX\\_i7bSczWzQgXwrgiP\\_BIY/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13LEU-dHr_fjhpXMACqHokX_i7bSczWzQgXwrgiP_BIY/edit#gid=0)

### Promote Connection

Given social distancing, the online learning platforms and the number of trainees that are home on either quarantine or canceled rotations, the need for personal connection is high. We recommend that you go beyond just suggesting that people get together virtually, but create organized opportunities and activities to ensure trainees can engage with each other. Some suggestions

- Regular small group Zoom sessions, organized in a manner relevant for your program, with a specific focus topic. This could be an educational topic or a wellness topic.
- Brainstorm ideas for fun activities that people can connect around. Some programs have tried things like:
  - Online games- <https://jackboxgames.com/>, charades via Zoom
  - Online Karaoke
  - Zoom lunchmates or coffee chats
  - Netflix parties
  - Zoom yoga and dog walking
  - Fitness weekly challenges as a program
  - Cooking clubs

- Virtual study rooms, study groups, education contests
- “30 things in 30 days contest
- Consider some type of buddy system – an example from Mayo: Pair an inpatient person with an outpatient person. Goals: Daily check-in to account for every person and share stresses and have outpatient resident help identify resources/needs for the inpatient resident.
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- Check out this [Google Document with Shared Ideas](#) from other programs

### **Model Self-care**

We are all managing this uncertainty in different ways. As much as possible, modeling your own strategies for self-care will have an important impact on your trainees. Acknowledge the difficulties that you and others face and validate the various feelings of anxiety, fear, guilt etc... And, find ways to engage and demonstrate the ways you are managing isolation, anxiety, and self-care. Some specific suggestions to strongly promote:

- Maintain some form of structure in your daily routine
- Encourage behaviors that help support mental health – do things that improve life for yourself, for those you care about, or for the people in your community. Help them think about what those things might be. Create a list and try to focus on doing at least one thing each day, and to fully engage
- Limit media consumption
- Get outside at least once a day
- Find time to move each day
- Reach out to others
- Nourish yourself
- Give others the benefit of the doubt
- Acknowledge your feelings and give yourself permission to grieve
- Practice gratitude – 3 things each day
- Remind yourself that this is temporary

The [GME Wellness Website](#) has additional lists of resources, free apps, and suggestions for spending your time. Check out this shared [COVID Cabin Fever](#) document as well.

A good article to read: [Four things to do every day for your mental health](#)

### **Support your Incoming Trainees**

- Consider opportunities to create connections between them and your program – perhaps invite them to a Zoom or other virtual gathering
- Help them with resources needed for a transition and be open to discussing any potential challenges they may have with the transition related to the current COVID crisis.
- We are working on resources to help with housing and other transition needs – these will be posted in in MS Teams.
- We strongly encourage you obtaining WUMCHA membership at a very reduced rate for all of your incoming trainees. They provide many resources and opportunities for connection that will likely be highly needed this coming July. (see WUMCH recruitment email in resource file)

Additional articles and examples of things program directors are doing are included as files in the Microsoft Teams PD, GME Wellness Channel. All PDs are welcome to post information about support practices that you have found useful and include example files or upload articles to the Team’s resource file.