Mental Wellness During COVID-19 and Beyond

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Objectives

1. Identify the common challenges to mental wellness and brain injury and how they can be magnified during the stressful events such as the COVID19 pandemic

2. Become aware of the triggers and warning signs of reduced mental wellness

3. Learn coping strategies for immediate management of stress symptoms

4. Increase knowledge of available community resources to maintain optimal mental wellness
Course Outline

Components of Mental Wellness

Wellness Needs for Different Populations
- Survivors of Brain Injury
- Caregivers
- Professionals

Common Wellness Challenges During COVID
- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Concrete Service Needs

Strategies

Resources
What is “Mental Wellness”

Finding balance in your physical, cognitive and emotional states

**Physical:** Exercise, eating habits, sleep

**Cognitive:** Attention, concentration, problem solving

**Emotional:** Stress management, emotional reactions
Different People Need Different Things

Survivors of Brain Injury

• **Physical Wellness** (ie. medications, PT/OT/ST, assistive technology)
• **Cognitive Wellness** (ie. cognitive rehabilitation, brain rest)
• **Emotional Needs**
  • Sense of independence
  • Sense of identity, values and purpose
  • Emotional lability/reactivity
  • Grief & loss post injury
  • Trauma needs
  • Financial stress
  • Family role
  • History of mental health needs
Different People Need Different Things

**Caregiver Needs**
- Changed Family Dynamics
- Caregiver Burnout
- Brain Injury Education
- Grief & Loss
- Financial Stress
- Emotional Reactions
- History of Mental Health Needs
- History of Physical/Cognitive Needs

**Professional Needs**
- Compassion Fatigue/Burnout
  - Work/Life Balance
- Adaptability to New Technology and Client Needs
- Brain Injury Education
- Trauma of COVID19 Front Line Staff
Common Worries Which Disrupt Wellness

After Injury:
- Making mistakes
- Getting “back to normal”
- Finances
- Grief & loss post injury
- Losing control of independence (ie. physical, financial, etc.)
- Driving (or lack of)
- Flashbacks
- Difficulty problem solving, processing speed and concentration which leads to feeling overwhelmed
- Memory challenges
- Perseveration on negative thoughts/worries
- Reinjury

During COVID19
- Restricted independence
- Will I get sick? Will my family get sick?
- Pause in treatment
  - My doctors are in the hospital, how will I get to them?
- Social Distancing
- Finances
- Grief and Loss of loved ones
- Job loss
- When will things be normal again?
Impact COVID19 has on Mental Wellness

Concrete Needs
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Depression
Concrete Needs & COVID19

- Access to healthcare can be restricted
- Food Access limited due to social distancing and out of stock items
- Financial burden
  - Unemployment
  - Paying rent/mortgage/utilities
  - Medical expenses
- Restricted Transportation
Anxiety

**Triggers**
- Finances
- Changes in Independence
- Family Stressors
- Unhelpful thoughts
- Medical needs
- Pauses in treatment

**Symptoms**
- Racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Uncontrollable worry
- Excessive unhelpful thoughts
- Fear that the worst will happen
- Restlessness
- Irritability
PTSD

**Triggers**
- Passing injury site
- Driving (if MVA)
- Loud noises
- **Watching the news** (if an injury or accident is featured)
- Anything (people, places or things) can be triggering for someone with PTSD

**Symptoms**
- High levels of anxiety
- Hyper startle response
- Flashbacks or frequent memories of trauma
- Fear that the worst will occur
- Self blame/Guilt
- Avoidance behaviors
- Irritability
- Isolation
- Reduced concentration
- Disrupted sleep
- Reduced interest in activities
Anxiety, PTSD & COVID19

Fight/Flight response is the body’s natural defense mechanism that is designed to protect us in “dangerous” environments.

COVID19 social distancing and restriction of activities can **increase** Anxiety and PTSD symptoms due to **restriction of the fight/flight response**.

With both anxiety and PTSD, the fight/flight response can become **overactive post injury** due to frequent experiences of triggers.
Fight/Flight Response

**Triggering Event**

**Fight/Flight Response Activated**

**“Thinking Brain” Begins to Shut Down**

**Anxiety & PTSD Symptoms Increase**

**Trigger Examples:**
- Site of accident
- Pictures of injury
- COVID19 news stories on TV
- Social distancing

**Signs Fight/Flight Activated:**
- Increased heart rate
- Sweaty palms
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath

**Signs “Thinking Brain” Impacted:**
- Reduced concentration
- Difficulty problem solving
- Reduced attention

**Symptoms:**
- Avoidance behaviors
- Isolation
- Panic
- Excessive worry
- Reduced sleep
Depression

**Triggers**
- Making mistakes
- Finances
- Loosing control of independence
- Inability/difficulty completing daily tasks
- Difficulty problem solving, processing speed and concentration which leads to feeling overwhelmed
- Memory challenges
- Perseveration on negative thoughts/worries
- Grief and loss

**Symptoms**
- Changes in sleep (up or down)
- Changes in eating (up or down)
- Irritability
- Low mood/Sadness
- Hopelessness & Helplessness
- Reduced concentration
- Reduced interest in activities
- Restlessness OR very slow moving
- Isolation from others
- Suicidal thoughts (*Note: not all people who suffer from depression are suicidal)
COVID19 Specific Strategies for Wellness

- Stay connected to support systems
  - Video conference/call family and friends
  - Virtual support groups
  - Telehealth
- Maintain routine and a schedule
  - Get dressed every morning, log into work if can, schedule HEP
- Exercise 30 minutes a day
- Eat well (ie. healthy diet and avoid stress eating)
- Mindfulness
- Do something creative/engaging OR learn something new
Strategies for General Mental Wellness

- Deep breathing (3-5 minutes)
- Grounding Meditation
  - 5 senses meditation
  - Anchoring
- Exercise
- Affirmations & Positive Self Talk
  - “I can do this,” “I am safe,” “Calm”
- Cognitive Reframing– evaluate fact vs. feeling
Resources available

Phone Applications: Insight Timer, Calm, Headspace

Exercise: Love Your Brain Yoga

BIANJ Support Groups

BIANJ CARES

BIANJ Help Line

Community Psychotherapists
Ask about telehealth services

Cognitive Rehabilitation Facilities
Ask about telehealth services
When to seek professional help?

- Feeling overwhelmed by sadness, anxiety, anger, etc. or other emotions that are “just not me”?
- Isolating from friends and family?
- Increasing conflict with others?
- Not participating in activities of interest (i.e., hobbies, work, family)?
- Using things such as alcohol, food, gambling or sex to cope with difficult feelings?
- Disruptions in sleep and/or appetite?
- General dissatisfaction with life?
How to Find a Community Psychotherapist

- **PsychologyToday.com** (Database of Psychotherapists)
- **Body and Mind Counseling LLC**
  - Email: info@body-mindcounseling.com
  - Website: body-mindcounseling.com
- **Telehealth Certification Institute**
  [https://telementalhealthtraining.com/provider-list?type_of_service%5B%5D=1&state_region%5B%5D=30&search=1&f4587e6c984e97054f2b4502c7559f90=1](https://telementalhealthtraining.com/provider-list?type_of_service%5B%5D=1&state_region%5B%5D=30&search=1&f4587e6c984e97054f2b4502c7559f90=1)
- **Call Back of Private Insurance Card***

*Don’t forget to task about telehealth services available and insurance coverage*
NJ Cognitive Rehabilitation Programs

- JFK Cognitive Rehabilitation (Edison) 732-906-2640
- Bacharach Institute (Pomona) 609-652-7000
- NeuroRestorative (Egg Harbor City; Delran) 800-743-6802
- Cambridge Rehabilitation Services (Ho Ho Kus) 201-251-8555
- Kessler (Saddle Brook) 201-368-6000
- Independence Rehabilitation Services (Cherry Hill) 800-356-7360

Note: These are just some programs, a full list is in the BIANJ Resource Guide.
Founded in 1981 by family members and friends of persons with brain injury, the Brain Injury Alliance of New Jersey is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and advocating for individuals affected by brain injury and raising public awareness through education and prevention.
BIANJ Programs and Services

- Direct Services
- Education
- Prevention
- Advocacy
Direct Services

- Case Management
  - Family Support
  - Support Coordination
  - CARES
- Information and Resources Helpline
  - 1-800-669-4323
  - Live Chat www.bianj.org
- Support Groups
- Camp TREK (Together in Recreation, Education, and Knowledge)
- Council for the Head Injured Community (CHIC)
Education

- Webinars
- Traveling Workshops
  - Brain Injury, Concussion, and Prevention
- Regional Trainings for Health and Human Services Professionals
- Annual Professional Seminar
- Family Fest
Prevention and Advocacy

Prevention
- U Got Brains Champion Schools Program
- Childhood Safety- in person presentations
- Distracted driving webpage
- Share the Road Campaign
- Concussion Campaign
- Seniors and Falls – in person presentation

Advocacy
- Legislative Network
CONNECT WITH US

- facebook.com/biaofnj
- twitter.com/braininjurynj
- youtube.com/brainhealthnetwork
- instagram.com/braininjuryallianceofnj
- www.bianj.org
Q&A

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