

In this seventh weekly newsletter we would like to share the experience of a person infected with COVID-19 who is also a medical staff member.

From a diary of a patient with COVID-19:

Day 1- Dear diary, yesterday me and my colleagues made the test, it is a routine procedure as we are medical staff. I was just informed that the response is positive ...! I thought it was a joke of my colleagues as they were all negative, but unfortunately it wasn't. I am shocked to learn that ... I have no symptoms and have tried to follow all the hygiene rules since I was afraid of transmitting the virus to my family and patients. I'm confused, upset, disappointed...!"

These are the words that Blerta*, a young nurse, wrote in her diary from the first day she found out she was infected with COVID-19. For several months now, COVID-19 has been the subject of many news and talks around the globe. Our lifestyle has changed: we have less 'going out for a coffee' and more 'don't go out', less physical contact, more online conversations; less 'we have a meeting at the meeting room' and more 'we have a meeting through zoom or skype'.

The way we feel and express our feelings has changed: we are encouraged to put ourselves in other people's shoes, but we often find ourselves superstitious. We rush to spread kindness, but sometimes we spread gossip. We rush to encourage, but often, unintentionally, we incite fear and insecurity, especially to those who are most sensitive, and at this time, to those who have been infected with COVID-19. The motto of these days is 'Together we will succeed', but how can we do our part to support each other? We want to tell you more about Blerta's experience...

Day 4: It's been two months now since I have met my parents as I was worried that I could transmit the virus to them. When they found out I was infected, they and other family members became very concerned, but thankfully, none of the contact persons came out positive. Well, that's at least good news...

Blerta tells us that although worried, the family members have been psychologically close to her, but it has not been the same with the distant relatives: *"The reaction of the people around me was very harsh, especially the neighbors and acquaintances. Some patients suddenly labeled me as "death", although I neither manufactured nor chose to become infected with the virus..."*

Often, 'gossip' is the product of situations where fear and insecurity prevail, and the same thing happened to Blerta: *"I felt bad about all the gossip and false information that was spread about me. Moreover, my identity became public, my health, which was my privacy and my right, was violated by those who published my data. I experienced the fuss (that I didn't ask for) with great stress."* And when it comes to fuss, in small communities like the one where Blerta lives, words spread very quickly and people start to be interested, often exaggerated: *"People with whom I had not communicated in years, bank clerks, shopping-mall workers, my wedding cameraman, and even people I didn't know at all began calling me. The question of all these people was, "Where did you get the corona virus?" I was so emotionally overloaded that I couldn't sleep for a few days."*

Day 7: I still have no symptoms. Ana from the faculty called me today. It's not that I had a lot of talks with her as we were in different school groups, we hadn't had any conversation to each other for almost 4 years. I wonder where she found the number. She pointed straight into the topic "I heard you have corona virus. Where did you get it? I almost hung up, I couldn't stand it anymore...!"

*At the person's request, the names have been changed

After several days of constant stress and anxiety, Blerta decided to take control of the situation: *“I decided to communicate only with close relatives and close friends, listen to less news and not pay attention to comments, read books, listen to music, I focused more on myself and tried to avoid stressful situations. I paid close attention to healthy nutrition and I was in constant contact with my colleagues, other nurses and the family doctor to inform them about their health.”*

Day 15: The second test response came out negative! Finally, a little more patience and I will return to life normally now... if I can really have my life as before...!

As she prepares to return to normality, Blerta has a message for all those who are tested positive with COVID-19: *“Be positive, as there is relief after each difficulty! It may seem at first that you will not succeed, you will be full of fear for yourself and your family but just keep your distance to protect them. Physical distance is not social distancing, so try to stay connected at all times with phone calls and messages. Do not hold any feelings inside, talk to someone you know, someone you trust and to whom you may speak freely, talk to close ones who support you, and everything will be fine. Keep a diary if it helps and you can write everything there.”*

“The emotional state of people infected with COVID-19 is very fragile, so support them with kind words, motivate them for the beautiful things that await them”

In the beginning was the Word! This saying as old as humanity itself is the golden formula for the situation of people infected with COVID-19 and their relatives: communicate and support each other.

“Stay close to people affected with COVID-19!” says Blerta. *“Their emotional state is very fragile, so support them with kind words, motivate them for the beautiful things that await them. Tell them how much you love them and that you can’t wait for everything to end so you can meet each other again.”*

Love is the only force and source of hope to stand for and fight in this life. Knowing that someone loves and is expecting you is the perfect encouragement to overcome any difficulty... including COVID-19.”

Health for All Project is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation that is being implemented by Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute



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Managing stress during COVID-19

The new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues take time to get used to. Adapting to lifestyle changes such as these, are challenging for all of us and can cause stress and anxiety.

Keep informed

Pay attention to the information you get and the time you spend in getting informed. Follow trusted news channels. Try to reduce how much you watch, read or listen to news that makes you feel anxious or distressed.



Have a routine

Get up and go to bed at similar times every day, eat healthy, exercise regularly, allocate time for working and time for resting, Make time for doing things you enjoy.



Social contact is important

Keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels.



Help others

If you are able to, offer support to people in your community who may need it, such as helping them with food shopping or other utility services.



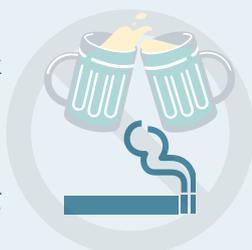
Screen time

Be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen every day. Make sure that you take regular breaks from on-screen activities.



Alcohol and drug use

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink or don't drink alcohol at all. Don't start drinking alcohol if you have not drunk alcohol before. Avoid using alcohol and drugs as a way of dealing with fear, anxiety, boredom and social isolation.



Don't discriminate

Fear is a normal reaction in situations of uncertainty. But sometimes fear is expressed in ways which are hurtful to other people. Don't discriminate against people because of your fears of the spread of COVID-19; don't discriminate against people who you think may have coronavirus; don't discriminate against health workers. COVID-19 has affected people from many countries. Don't attribute it to any specific group

