LESSONS LEARNED FROM HONG KONG

By Dr Zoe Fortune, CEO CMHA Hong Kong

Supporting your colleagues during the COVID-19 outbreak

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City Mental Health Alliance UK

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KEY LESSONS

Dr Zoe Fortune, CEO of CMHA Hong Kong, shares the lessons learned from Hong Kong during the coronavirus outbreak.

THE CHALLENGES

The challenges we've been hearing from our members in Hong Kong are constantly evolving. They can be summarised below:

- **Information** - knowing what information to communicate, how regularly and what sources to use. Being aware of 'fake news' and finding resources tailored to groups who may need additional support;
- **Remote Working** - challenges include working from small spaces, having a lack of outside space, looking after children and living with other family members who are working from home;
- **Infrastructure** - people may lack an appropriate work space, have inadequate WiFi or lack the necessary IT;
- **Upskilling Managers** - many managers are having to manage teams remotely with new and changing patterns of communication and working hours. It can also be difficult for managers to notice small changes in behaviour relevant to someone's mental health when they are working remotely;
- **Maintaining Routines** - working times and format have often had to change and many people are working from different locations and time zones;
- **Financial challenges** - some people have been worried about their job security, pay cuts or lack of work.
- **Isolation** - this is also recently coupled with separation of families - either in different countries or staying in temporary accommodation during the two week isolation period after returning to Hong Kong from other countries;
- **New staff** - recruitment and on-boarding processes need to change with many working from home.
- **Returning to work** - ensuring that staff feel safe and supported as they return to work and being aware of special circumstances (such as being a carer) is important.

THE POSITIVES

In Hong Kong, members have found it has been important for people to also focus on the positives that have arisen during the coronavirus outbreak. These include:

- In Hong Kong, this has shown that working from home does work. People are productive and have been able to trial new ways of working and interacting;
- People are innovating in many ways e.g. online exercise, virtual dinner parties, zoom for online learning with classmates;
- More organisations are talking about mental health. This has been a chance to speak more openly and see how we can support one another. A chance to reflect and see if we are building workplaces where people are able to thrive;
- Teams are getting to know each other differently. “I’ve lost count of the number of times my children have said hi to people on conference calls” says Zoe. It’s an opportunity to get to know people outside the office and bring your whole self to work;
- There has been a rise in community awareness and social conscience;
- People have had increased quality time with their family. Families have been able to have more meals together, play games together and parents now have a greater understanding of what their children are learning at school.

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PRACTICAL ACTIONS

EXAMPLE INITIATIVES

Below are some example steps that CMHA Hong Kong members have taken. These are reported to have had a positive impact on supporting people during this time:

Infodemic:

- Select a just a few, reputable sources to send to employees to avoid complicating the messages;
- Use clear messaging that is apolitical and sticks to the facts;
- Ask senior leaders to play a role in providing key information on where people can get support from, both internally and externally.

Working from home

- Some companies in Hong Kong have done A/B working, splitting employees into two teams to allow for greater flexibility;
- Have regular check-ins not about work. Remember it's much harder to detect if someone is struggling when working remotely;
- Encourage people to take breaks, do physical exercise and log off when the day finishes. It's important senior employees lead by example.

Communication

- Encourage employees to stay connected and have regular check-ins (either formal or informal) with their teams via digital platforms;
- Some companies have managed messages by recording their own videos with external advisers to facilitate Q&As or training e.g. with psychologists and physicians;
- Communicate all company policies clearly and regularly;
- Increase awareness of the company EAP (Employee Assistance Program) to ensure that staff are aware of support and how to access it. At a company level, it can be helpful to be aware of a potential increase in usage and ensure there is provision for this;
- Some companies with on-site psychologists have explored different ways of working such as online sessions.

RESOURCES

- Watch Dr Zoe Fortune's video detailing full advice here: https://bit.ly/2Jl4Ip7
- View all CMHA resources in response to the coronavirus outbreak here: https://bit.ly/39lVSIt

CONTACT

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This document is not and should not be considered as clinical advice or support. Anyone who may have a need for such support should seek professional advice.