COVID-19 AND PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES

How to Protect Your Patients and Your Practice

Public health officials are monitoring the spread of the coronavirus. Psychologists can take steps now to prepare their practices, address patient concerns and manage anxiety in their communities.

PREPARE YOUR PRACTICE

Consider how a potential outbreak in your community might affect your business. Review your finances and business policies and determine how you can be more flexible. Can you alter your cancellation policy or waive fees to accommodate potential last-minute cancellations? Do you have enough in reserves to cover expenses if you experience a decline in services or become ill yourself? Do you have a plan for someone to handle communications and pay your bills if you become ill?

EXPLORE TELEPSYCHOLOGY OPTIONS

Are you equipped to offer psychology services via phone or secure videoconferencing from your office or home during an outbreak or quarantine? Check APA's guide-lines for the practice of telepsychology (**apa.org/practice/guidelines/telepsychology**) as well as *How to make the most of telepsychology and steer clear of pitfalls* (**apa.org/monitor/2017/05/ce-corner**). If you are on insurance panels, be sure to confirm whether they will reimburse for services provided in this manner. Talk with patients about using telehealth platforms to meet for appointments if illness interferes with face-to-face sessions.

REVIEW YOUR MALPRACTICE INSURANCE POLICY

Check for policy clauses on confidentiality and work-from-home considerations specific to telepsychology services. Check into the feasibility and risks of having health records available at a home office if you suspend services at your practice office.

Help to quell fear by providing credible information to patients, community leaders, and local media.

DEVELOP A PATIENT COMMUNICATION PLAN
Determine how to stay in touch with patients and their families during an outbreak or quarantine. Write a notice outlining how your office will function so you are prepared to discuss with patients. Review it with every patient; post it to your website, in your waiting room, and share by email. Include information on office policies and procedures such as last-minute closings and cancellations.

IMPLEMENT A PLAN FOR GROUP PRACTICES
Be sure that your employees have up-to-date information so they can respond consistently. Review the U.S. Chamber of Commerce guide for employers (**uschamber. com/sites/default/files/guidance_for_employers_to_ plan_and_respond_to_coronavirus.pdf**).

PROMOTE HYGIENE IN YOUR PRACTICE
Create a safe office environment for patients and employees. Post signs encouraging hand-washing and put hand sanitizers in waiting rooms, offices and restrooms. Regularly check the Centers for Disease Control website for updates and guidance on preventing the spread of coronavirus (**cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ index.html**).

HELP MANAGE PATIENT AND COMMUNITY ANXIETY
News reports about the coronavirus and the possibility that it could become more widespread are making some people anxious. Help to quell fear by providing credible information to patients, community leaders, and local media. Share APA's tips on managing anxiety and putting news reports in perspective (**apa.org/helpcenter/pandemics**) and the Speaking of Psychology Podcast (**apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/ coronavirus-anxiety**) episode on coronavirus anxiety. Visit the APA website (**apa.org**) for more resources. Offer yourself as a resource for local media on managing coronavirus anxiety.

MAKE SELF-CARE A PRIORITY
Remember to take care of your own health and that of your family. It can be tempting to prioritize patient needs, but remember that if you become ill, you cannot provide effective care. Listen to APA's podcast episode on self-care for psychologists (**apaservices.org/practice/ business/podcasts/self-care**).