MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The global COVID-19 outbreak is having a profound impact, including on people in the veterinary industry. Public health and government advice for self-isolation and for all of us to increase social distancing poses huge challenges for our industry and its people, as well as the clients we support and the patients we care for. With this uncertainty, restriction and change, we see challenges for our mental health.

10 tips:

1. Reduce worry and anxiety where you can
Minimise watching, reading or listening to news that causes you to feel anxious or distressed. Seek information updates only ones or twice, at specific times during the day, from a trusted source. Resist constant updates and checking which can increase anxiety and distress.

2. Maintain social contact
Being socially connected to people is key for mental health. Try to maintain and structure in regular contact to people dear to you by phone, video call, social media, and other ways that are possible within the restrictions you face.

3. Keep to a routine structure
Over recent weeks many veterinary practices and working environments have rapidly changed their working practices and many of us are now spending more time working alone. Keeping to normal timings, maintain a routine even if it is an adapted one, and keep in safe contact with people.

4. Self-care: rest and sleep enough
Rest, sleep, nutrition and hydration are more important than ever. To care for others we also need to care for ourselves. Adapting to change and feelings of vulnerability place significant demands on us. Prioritise sleep and rest where you can.

5. Live healthy & focus on what you can control
Try to move or keep on doing some exercise daily. Exercise releases chemicals important for your mental health. Eat healthy. Identify aspects of your life and work which you can control – even if small – focus time each day on these.

6. Take extra care of your staff
These are challenging times. Emphasise a sense of safety and solidarity in your team. Support staff safety through the right resources, equipment and protections. Keep staff updated with regular bulletins but await decisions where you can communicate with clarity. Plan regular small debriefs for staff working remotely. Keep in regular contact, promote peer support and a culture of it being OK to say that you are not OK.

7. Make allowance for circumstances
Although our industry is facing this together, individuals also face their own challenges in their unique situations with health vulnerabilities, financial insecurity, isolation, and previous experiences of adversity. Look out for colleagues, offer support and if you are struggling, do not hesitate to call out and ask for help. You are not alone.

8. Financial challenges: we are in it together
This is a financially challenging time for most veterinarians. Client visits often have reduced greatly, and many practice owners have worries about how they will keep running their practice and their staff. Also many self-employed veterinarians are facing financial difficulty? It’s important to talk about concerns and worries like this and not keep them to yourself. You are not alone, we are all in this together!

9. Focus on contribution and meaning
As veterinarians, we want to help and some of us may experience frustration at having aligned clinical knowledge but being unable to be on the clinical frontline in a human health emergency. Maintaining day to day meaning in our roles may feel challenging at times through this, but it is vital. We know that as well as the contributions veterinarians in some roles can make to frontline efforts to combat the outbreak, that maintaining food production and supporting the lives of people who rely on their animals are vital at times of trouble. Animals bring people joy, comfort and reasons to keep going in difficulty, and we all have a role and can help.

10. Reminder: together come out of it stronger
In the veterinary world, we have faced many disease outbreaks before, with all the challenges and difficulties attached. However, we also learned from previous outbreaks that we are a strong and resilient profession who adapt in times of difficulty, and that we are strongest when we are working together and supporting each other.

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