



Minding your mental health

Catherine O'Connor reminds student nurses and midwives that they need to look after their mental health now more than ever

THESE past few months have been particularly stressful for many people but especially for our students. Being a student nurse or midwife can be challenging at the best of times, let alone in the middle of a global pandemic. Now, more than ever, it is important that we take the time to check in with ourselves and evaluate how our mental health is being affected by our circumstances. With this in mind, I'd like to explore some ways that we can all mind our mental health.

While we are frequently told about the importance of 'minding our mental health', it's worth examining what exactly mental health encompasses, as it is not simply the absence of mental illness. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as being "a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community".

The WHO has said that one in four people will struggle with their mental health at some point in their lives. Our mental health can be challenged for any number of reasons, be it events at home or work, relationship difficulties or pressures from meeting academic requirements. Accepting that both good and bad days are a normal part of life can make it easier to manage the bad days. By taking proactive steps to protect and strengthen our mental health when we are feeling well, it can help us to plan for how to cope when we're having a challenging day.

Develop good habits

There are a variety of ways that we can develop good habits to protect our mental health. In 2018, the HSE developed a campaign that focuses on the 'Little Things' that we can do to mind our mental health. Some of these things include ensuring to get enough sleep (seven to eight hours

Table: Organisations offering support or information

Organisation	Website	Contact details	Service provided
Samaritans Ireland	www.samaritansorg/ireland/samaritans-ireland/	Freephone 116 123 Email jo@samaritans.ie	24/7 Listening service and emotional support for people experiencing distress
Aware	www.aware.ie	Freephone 1800 804848 Email supportmail@aware.ie	Support and information for people experiencing stress, depression, bipolar disorder and mood related conditions
Pieta House	www.pieta.ie	Freephone 1800 247247 Text HELP to 51444	Free therapy to those engaging in self-harm, experiencing suicidal ideation, or bereaved by suicide.
Jigsaw	www.jigsaw.ie	Tel 01 472 7010 Email info@jigsaw.ie	Support and information for people ages 12-25
Spun Out	www.spunout.ie	Text SPUNOUT to 086 1800 280	Provide information on health and wellbeing
BodyWhys	www.bodywhys.ie	Tel 01 2107906 Email alex@bodywhys.ie	Support and information for people affected by eating disorders
LGBT Ireland	www.lgbt.ie	Phone 1890 929539 Email info@lgbt.ie	Support and information for members of the LGBTQI+ community
Women's Aid	www.womensaid.ie	Freephone: 1800 341900	Advice and practical support for women and children experiencing physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse.
HSE	www.yourmentalhealth.ie	Text YMH to 086 1800 280 Tel 1850 24 1850	Information and advice on mental health

per night), reducing alcohol consumption, eating regular nutritious meals, and keeping active by exercising for at least 30 minutes per day, five days a week.

Limiting social media exposure and moderating or eliminating caffeine, tobacco, and drug intake has also been linked with improved mental health.

Several studies have also shown the importance our environment can have

on our mental health – walking in nature or even sitting in a room with a view or with indoor plants has been linked with an enhanced sense of wellbeing. Some studies indicate that there can be benefits to gratitude journaling – writing down a few things that we're grateful for regularly can have a positive effect on our life satisfaction, particularly when used in conjunction with other stress management techniques.

One of the most important ways that we can mind our mental health is by connecting with other people. Under normal circumstances this could include engaging in group activities such as sport or volunteering as doing things with others can remind us that we're part of a community. It would also include keeping in touch with loved ones – be it meeting for a cup of tea or going for a walk together. However, while we have to maintain our social distance outside of the workplace we are more limited. Make sure you still connect with people by catching up via video chat.

Having a strong support network by maintaining relationships with friends and family can be crucial to contributing positively to our mental health. It's also important that we look out for one another; if you notice that a friend or classmate seems quiet or just not themselves, check in with them. Providing a listening ear can make the world of difference. It doesn't mean that you have to fix all of their problems for them – just being there so that they know you care can be enough.

Historically in Ireland, there has been a stigma surrounding mental health, and this has contributed towards people not talking about their mental health as they may

have felt ashamed or worried about what other people would think about them.

Thankfully, as a society we seem to be moving away from this and it is becoming more socially acceptable to reach out for support as more and more people share their mental health experiences. I feel it's important to recognise that sometimes there can be a stigma surrounding healthcare workers reaching out for support.

Seek support

Some nurses and midwives may feel that they have to 'stay strong' in order to be able to look after their patients. It's important to recognise that although you may be providing care to others, you also need to look after yourself.

Speaking to someone you trust about what you're going through can prove to be invaluable in terms of receiving help and staying well, but that doesn't mean that it's an easy thing to do. It can be difficult to know where to start when first opening up to someone about your mental health and the thought of it can be daunting. A good place to start is to simply say how you're feeling, be honest and use words that feel comfortable to you.

There may be times you feel you want support but don't feel able to speak to

friends or family. The *Table* on the previous page lists some organisations that you may find useful to engage with at some point. INMO members have access to a 24-hour counselling helpline service (Tel: 1850 670407 or 01 8818047) which provides confidential counselling over the telephone including, where appropriate, onward referral to relevant voluntary and/or professional services. For further information, see: www.inmo.ie/membership_benefits

It is also important not to forget supports that exist in colleges such as link lecturers, student union welfare officers, and student counselling services. There are also supports in clinical placement sites, for example you can share concerns about the pressure of placement with your CPCs. As internship students are employees, they have access to the employee assistance and counselling service; more details available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplace-health-and-wellbeing-unit/employee-assistance-and-counselling-service/>

Remember that no matter how you are feeling, you are not alone. If you are concerned about your mental health, help and support is there for you

If you would like to get in touch with Catherine O'Connor, email: catherine.oconnor@INMO.ie or Tel: 01 6640684



Nutricia Ireland would like to extend thanks to all the nurses and healthcare workers

on the frontline of the health services during this difficult and challenging time.

We appreciate your dedication and commitment and all you are doing for the health of the nation during the COVID-19 crisis.

Thank You

