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Now More Than Ever We Need to be Vigilant for Symptoms of Distress

By Syretta Spears
UCF Forum columnist
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In addition to the unknown physical effects the coronavirus has on the human body, there could be lasting mental effects, as well.



We've all heard "April showers bring May flowers," a favorite quote that reminds us that a new season is upon us and the possibilities of brighter days are just around the corner.

But this year is different.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and during this unprecedented time we should all take assessment of our mental well-being and that of those close to us.

Living through a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic with so many uncertainties, people may unknowingly suffer trauma, mental anguish and heightened stress levels. In addition to the unknown physical effects this virus has on the human body, there could be lasting mental effects, as well.

At any given time these effects may arise, especially now that our country has been practicing social distancing, self-quarantining and abiding by shelter-in-place measures. With ever-changing health guidelines, alarming statistics, financial stressors and self-isolation measures, some people will encounter some form of emotional and mental distress or breakdown.

Everyone can use some practical tools that can be used to improve mental health and increase resiliency no matter the situation one may be facing.

With all these stressors, everyone can use some practical tools that can be used to improve mental health and increase resiliency no matter the situation one may be facing. In the midst of a pandemic, these tools may prove more useful than ever, even if simply to assess how you feel or to monitor those closest to you that may show signs of struggle.

For some with serious mental illness it's imperative to seek assistance or continue to monitor their current state of well-being. More prone to chronic diseases, these individuals cannot risk further physical distress in light of the virus lurking among us.

We are also reminded that depression, a mental health condition, is on the rise and affects many no matter the age or social status. During times of uncertainty, these conditions can lead to increased rates of suicide and feelings of despair.

As a sad reminder, a doctor responsible for the care of many coronavirus patients recently died by suicide. Having no known history of mental illness, she undoubtedly was under mental strain of being on the pandemic's front line. I'm not saying that all front-line professionals are depressed or in some way mentally distressed or that all essential workers are in mental distress, but that everyone handles tragedy differently. Triggers for one may not be the same for another individual but this type of ordeal could certainly be the catalyst for some.

For individuals medically diagnosed as mentally ill – including children – it's imperative that we stay observant to ensure those who need help will get it. Now more than ever, we should all be vigilant for symptoms of distress and doing all that we can to help save a life.

Mental Health Awareness Month is more essential than ever – and right on time this year. Organized annually, the event brings awareness to those living with mental illness or without. Mental Health Awareness Month is designed to help us recognize signs of

distress, start those awkward conversations, and identify the appropriate professionals and resources to assist those who may be experiencing signs and symptoms. It also helps bring attention to suicide, which is often precipitated by mental illness. In addition, the month strives to remove the stigma and negative connotation associated with mental illness, which often prevents people in need from pursuing support and treatment.

With so many uncertainties these days we are all subject to physical and emotional stressors, which could lead to mental instability. Being cognizant of potential triggers and having resources and support available will help us all stay strong, healthy and resilient.

To those not feeling your best emotionally or mentally, there is no shame in seeking support.

To all essential workers and healthcare professionals, thank you for your dedication and service.

And to each and every one, stay safe and be well. We are all in this together – and brighter days are ahead.

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