

COVID-19 Chapter 6: Mental Health

[intro music]

Erin Welsh Hi, I'm Erin Welsh.

Erin Updyke And I'm Erin Allmann Updyke.

Erin Welsh And this is This Podcast Will Kill You.

Erin Updyke Sure is.

Erin Welsh This is an episode that's chapter 6 of our series called 'Anatomy of a Pandemic' which covers COVID-19 and all the different aspects of disease. It's been about a week and a half since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO, and since that time, our lives, everyone's lives, have changed dramatically, some more than others. And, you know, I think it's our tendency... I can speak for both of us, Erin, right?

Erin Updyke For sure.

Erin Welsh When I say that we like to fight fear with facts, but there is still so much about this virus and this pandemic that we don't know about and we don't know how it's going to go. We don't have a roadmap for this, and thinking about our personal risk, or our risk to others, or the risk to our families, or our friends, or the economic outcomes, I mean, all of this can send us swirling down the rabbit hole of stress and anxiety and bad dreams. Or lack of sleep. That's not exactly a helpful thing.

Erin Updyke No.

Erin Welsh So we wanted to bring on a couple of amazing people who can share with us some coping strategies or good practices to try to get a handle on our stress and anxiety and to help us think about where it's coming from.

Erin Updyke Mhm. So, for this episode we were really fortunate to speak to Rosemary Walker and Peter Rosencrans, two graduate students at the University of Washington in psychology to talk to us about all of, kind of, the mental health issues about this pandemic. They were really incredible to talk to and so so we hope you enjoy this episode. I think it was one of our favorites to record, because this is stuff that we don't know anything about. We go into anxiety spirals [chuckles] just like everyone else, uh, very easily. So this really, really personally useful and hopefully it'll be useful for listeners as well.

Erin Welsh Yeah. So, but first, we do indeed...

Erin Updyke Oh! [laughter] Speaking of coping strategies, Erin...

Erin Welsh This is, we do not recommend alcohol in any way as a coping strategy.

Erin Updyke No, no, huh-uh.

Erin Welsh But, because, you know, branding and symmetry, we have to have a quarantini recipe.

Erin Updyke So if you want to make the placeborita version, that'd be a good coping strategy.

Erin Welsh Yeah! It's pretty delish. So, what is in quarantini six?

Erin Updyke Quarantini six is a wine spritzer. With pineapple juice, and some kind of like a nice fruity white wine like a pino greege or something. I don't know, whatever you have in your cupboard.

Erin Welsh Yeah, seriously. That's kind of the theme of these quarantinis, is just, you know.

Erin Updyke This is what we had. A can of pineapple juice and a twist top bottle of wine.

Erin Welsh Don't knock the twist top.

Erin Updyke No, I love twist top! I was actually disappointed in myself that I bought multiple bottles and one of them had a cork, and I was like, dang, should have gone all twist.

Erin Welsh I shred about 40% of the corks that I try to remove.

Erin Updyke Do you really?

Erin Welsh ...remove. Yeah.

Erin Updyke I learned something new about you today. [light laughter]. Let's take a quick break, and then dive into this episode. [chuckles]

[musical interlude]

Rosemary Walker My name is Rosemary Walker. So, I'm a sixth-year doctoral student at the University of Washington. And my lab focuses on, or our lab is called the Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress, and a lot of our work focuses on providing psychotherapy to individuals with anxiety disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder. And I work in various clinics throughout the Seattle area, mainly our university clinic where we provide psychotherapy to individuals with kind of a broad spectrum of mental health needs.

Pete Rosencrans My name is Pete Rosencrans. I'm a fourth-year doctoral student at the University of Washington. Also working in the Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress, which is Dr. Lori Zoellner's lab at U-dub. Similar to Rosie, my research interests primarily focused on anxiety and PTSD, particularly on elucidating, some of the

treatment mechanisms and therapeutic change processes that are going on in our treatments for these issues. And also similarly to Rosie, kind of do a range of clinical experiences ranging from clients I see through our university psychology graduate clinic, our training clinic, as well as external practice sites around the Seattle area.

Erin Welsh Awesome. Thank you. So, I mean, first I would love to hear how you guys are doing. So, you're in Washington state, which is one of the States that's been hit the hardest by COVID-19. And so, you know, you've been experiencing these things and probably thinking about these things on a day to day basis much earlier than some of the rest of us in the US have. So can you just, I don't know, how are you guys doing? [chuckles]

Rosemary Walker Yeah, yeah, that's a good question. And I've been getting that a lot, you know, I think, cause it really, it hit here first and so it has been, I think a little bit more present for us for a bit longer than other parts of the country. And yeah, I would say, I would say it's been a, it's been a challenging time. Life as we have known it has really changed, which is now probably starting to be true for most people across the country, across the world really. And I think one of the hardest parts has really been the uncertainty of it all. And a lot of adjusting to changes in, you know, lifestyle and work and things like that. And the social distancing aspect has been difficult as well. I think on the other hand, we've heard this a lot this week across patients and friends in Seattle, but the sun came out this past week, which I think we have been especially thankful for. I also would say there's been a feeling of, you know, shared humanity and community and a lot of creativity being sparked, too, in the past few weeks that I've really seen from, you know, breweries and restaurants offering kind of curbside deliveries that they, you know, hand to you on a pole into your car, to, you know, organizations gathering people to babysit for medical professionals or writing letters to individuals who are quarantined or organizing dance parties in the street, things like that. So it's been, it's a difficult time. The uncertainty is hard and I also think there's been, it's been uplifting to see the community coming together.

Pete Rosencrans Yeah, I would, I would really echo pretty much everything that Rosie is saying. The uncertainty has definitely been a major challenge. I also think it's, especially early on when we were seeing some of those first cases emerge here, it really wasn't clear what we should be expecting and exactly what we needed to be doing, and kind of just what the future in the near term was going to look like. And that was just kind of really hard to navigate and prepare for. Now, there does seem to be a bit of a new normal that's being established here with, you know, pretty much everybody is working remotely at this point except for kind of those essential businesses and services. There's a lot of social distancing going on, self-quarantining going on, and it's becoming increasingly clear, at least to me, my general assumption is that we're in this for a longer haul than I initially expected. On the scale of months as opposed to days or weeks. And so I think at this point, main challenge for me is just trying to kind of embrace this new normal and figure out, you know, how do I want to structure my day? So that I can retain some semblance of normalcy and build some new routines into my life, and how can I

kind of make the changes that need to be making to ensure that I can keep up my work, my personal wellbeing, social connections, all those sorts of things.

Erin Updyke Yeah. So the impacts of this disease we're seeing is they're super diverse, of course, and much broader than just the impact on people's health. And none of us have really ever experienced something like this before, especially not on this scale. So what are we seeing in terms of some of the mental health outcomes?

Pete Rosencrans Yeah, so I can start out talking just kind of generally about what we're seeing, broadly speaking in terms of mental health outcomes. And I think you're really, you're hitting the nail on the head there when you say that this is an unprecedented situation because I think in a lot of ways that defines our reaction right now, it's just that inherent uncertainty that's going on. So broadly speaking, I think we're seeing kind of an increase in some negative mental health outcomes and as well as a decrease in some positive aspects of mental health. So what I mean by that is, on the negative side, we're seeing increases in stress and anxiety on a pretty broad scale. They're being driven by actual health and socioeconomic threats to ourselves, our loved ones in our communities that COVID-9 presents. And I think that stress and anxiety has really been by that sense of uncertainty and that sense of helplessness that often comes along with this. We know from a long history of research in animals and mammals and humans that uncertainty, and unpredictability, and uncontrollability really tend to drive these fear and anxiety reactions and kind of exacerbate them. So I think we're seeing those reactions really amp up. I think we're also just seeing difficulties that come along with balancing competing demands from work, family, personal responsibilities, your social needs. You know, there are families who have kids who are home from school because the school systems are closed while the parents are trying to work remotely at the same time. Probably have households where some parents are maybe getting sick and also trying to care for their children at the same time. And that just really increases the overall stress and level of demand across the board. Some other key things I think we're seeing are kind of a sense of detachment from our social connections and from our social lives in general that comes along with this effort to practice social distancing and self-quarantining. So we're spending more time in isolation, or maybe solely with members of our household. We're maybe seeing some disruptions in social activities and social connections. We're seeing kind of big life events be disrupted. So, weddings happen to be canceled or mood, vacations reschedule, you know, maybe visits that were scheduled to family members who live in a different area, those are being put on hold. And so I think what comes along with that in addition to the kind of increase in anxiety and stress that I talked about, there's also, we're kind of losing access to some of these sources of positivity and reward that we ordinarily have that kind of make our lives enjoyable. We're seeing our hobbies be interrupted, we're seeing disruption to the things that we find fun and that we like to do. And some of the reactions we can see from this can be, you know, sadness in response to some of those losses, might even see some depressed mood as some of those activities have to be canceled or postponed indefinitely. And as we kind of decrease our activity overall and lose access to some of those positive things in our lives, we might be seeing some decreased motivation in

general as well as anhedonia, kind of a loss of an ability to experience positive feelings.

Rosemary Walker

I was just going to add a little bit more. You know, I echo, I would echo everything Pete says, but I would also add a couple unique considerations for the clinical populations we work with. So we work particularly a lot with individuals with, experiencing mood and anxiety disorders. And you know, for, for individuals with anxiety in particular, one thing we know is that uncertainty tends to be, most people don't love uncertainty, but for individuals with anxiety disorders, uncertainty is particularly challenging to tolerate. So, you know, we can see, we can imagine that this might be impacting them kind of even more. And another piece of it also is that a lot of our work with individuals with anxiety disorders focuses on challenging, sort of overly negative or catastrophic thoughts. So these thoughts might be that we focus a lot on might be things like "the world is completely dangerous" or "something terrible is going to happen to me or my family if I don't take extreme precautions," for example. And so, a lot of our work, like I said, in psychotherapy, we focus on challenging these beliefs through various evidence-based techniques to help individuals develop more balanced or realistic thoughts. And so you can imagine that the current COVID-19 situation is making some of those catastrophic beliefs a little bit harder or more difficult to challenge for some of our patients. So, you know, having the, the reality is that risks right now of becoming sick or loved ones coming sick are higher. And so again, we're sort of aware of the fact that for many of our patients they're experiencing kind of, even, finding it even more difficult to kind of work to challenge those overly kind of catastrophic beliefs. And then also, kind of, there are some specific considerations for individuals experiencing, or, in psychotherapy for depression. Because, sort of Pete hit on this a little bit, but a lot of the work that we do with our patients with depression is around scheduling activities. Because there is a real link, we've seen this kind of consistently, and a lot of our therapies are based on the kind of connection between your activity level and your mood. And so, when we're working with individuals experiencing depression, we might spend a lot of time making, kind of, an activity schedule to boost their mood. And we know that kind of, engaging in activities that are values based, tends to have a positive effect on our mood. And it's one of our main ways for targeting depressed mood. So, again, sort of like we were all just talking about, you can imagine there might be some particular implications for individuals already experiencing depression to then have it harder to access these activities or to be active, because of social distancing. So we're really working to be proactive and creative to address that with our patients who we're working with who are experiencing depression.

Erin Welsh

Yeah. That is, you know, additional challenges. It's, that's very important. So, you know, you two have unique perspectives in the mental health profession. Can you talk about some of the challenges that you have faced so far and some of the challenges that you think are going to appear in the future as this COVID-19 situation progresses?

Rosemary Walker

Yeah, yeah. I think, you know, like everybody else right now this is all very novel. We're navigating new water. And I think over the past month, flexibility has been incredibly important for us and also for our patients. So, you know, for example, one day the university of Washington clinic was seeing patients in person and then we changed the next day to kind of having an optional in-person and then an option that do what we call tele-health or sort of therapy virtually. And, and then the very next day we changed it to all sessions had to be moved to tele-health. So I think just, you know, being really flexible and creative and in terms of kind of rolling with the updates and sort of the new restrictions, and also balancing, kind of, the needs of our patients with the need for social distancing, and working with our patients to find something that works for them if we can't meet in person. Not all the clinics in Seattle have the ability to move to tele-health or even want to, you know, again, it's sort of a balance between what's best for our patients and also the need to distance ourselves right now. So, for example, if patients are particularly at high risk for suicide, a provider might decide that meeting in person is still important or necessary. Patients with social anxiety, it might be a real barrier to get them to meet via tele-health. On the other hand, tele-health has been around for a long time. Not everybody's trained in it, so some people have had to kind of go through really quick training to be able to provide tele-health. But you know, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that it can be very effective. And yeah, I think that's been a big piece of it is also just getting that all set up for everybody. And then there's more specific things, again, to our psychotherapies as we deliver them that need to be adapted if you're going to be doing them via telehealth. So things like, you know, when we're treating patients with anxiety disorders, a lot of the time we actually leave the clinic and go out and do what we call exposure exercises. So things like having our patients approach things that they're afraid of in order to learn that it's not actually dangerous or that they can tolerate the distress that comes up as they approach that feared situation. And so sometimes we do that in our sessions and clearly that's more challenging when you're meeting via tele-health. But again, there are resources to turn to, because tele-health has been rolled out you know, becoming used, used more and more, especially for rural populations and things like that over the past few years. So yeah, I would say I, again, I would just say that flexibility has been really important in sort of trying to meet the needs of our patients as best we can despite the current events and the limitations that are being put on us. And maybe some of the reasons why it's maybe not best to meet in person.

Erin Updyke

Yeah. So we've heard a lot from our listeners, our friends and family, you guys brought up a lot of the different stressors and anxieties that people have been feeling. Erin and I, I can speak for us both, right, Erin? [chuckles]

Erin Welsh

Oh, yeah [chuckles]

Erin Updyke

We, we've both been really feeling this as well too. A lot of the fear, the apprehension, the anxiety about all of this uncertainty, even us, even though we kind of, you know, know about the fact that these sorts of pandemics could potentially happen, it's still so unknown what is, what is going to happen. So

could you talk a little bit about some of the coping strategies that we could all use to try and deal with some of the issues that we're facing? Like the social isolation, the empathy fatigue, and all of this anxiety about the future?

Pete
Rosencrans

Yeah, absolutely. I think there's a, there's a lot we could cover here. So I'm going to, I'm going to cover some things up front and then Rosie's going to take over from there. So the first place I would start out is just to really emphasize the importance of normalizing and validating some of these negative emotional responses and feelings that are coming up. As you're saying with the levels of uncertainty that we have, how little we know about how this is gonna progress, and kind of what the actual level of threat is, as well as those kind of socioeconomic stressors that come along with the health risks. You know, stress and anxiety are certainly to be expected here. And it's not a sign, if you're experiencing elevated stress and anxiety right now, it's not a sign that something is kind of fundamentally wrong with you. Those feelings are normal given this context and there might be some comfort and just kind of reminding yourself of that when you notice these feelings coming up in a more intense way than maybe you've been used to in the past. And then to really kind of validate them, like, the feelings aren't coming out of nowhere, right? Like there is an actual threat out there. There is actual kind of bonafide uncertainty and unpredictability out there and that's what these emotions are really responding to and that's the way they're supposed to function. And so these emotional responses, even though they can be unpleasant, oftentimes they actually have real value to us. Anxiety and worry again certainly can be unpleasant, but it can also help motivate us to prepare and protect ourselves and our families. Key thing I would also mention here is, while it's important to validate and normalize these feelings and kind of accept them that they're kind of part of our experience for now, given the situation that we're in, I think it's also important to be on the lookout for unhelpful thoughts and unhelpful behaviors. So, you can ask yourself, is what I'm going to do or what I'm doing, is this actually useful or helpful or effective for me right now? One of the key things that we talk about is distinguishing between helpful and unhelpful worry. So, most people are probably worrying a lot right now. To the extent that that worry and anxiety actually leads to active problem solving and adaptive coping strategies, that worry is actually useful, and it can be helpful to kind of lean into that and act on the urges that come with it. However, worry can also be taken to an extreme. And worry can kind of, it can go beyond actually helping us take constructive action and it can start to become more just self-perpetuating. So, I would say that worry that leads to rumination, or the sense of spinning, or generally just to, to more anxiety and more worry without producing concrete helpful behaviors, that's not going to be so helpful. So when you notice that kind of worry coming, coming up, it can be helpful to engage in some strategies to limit it. It might be, you know, limiting your news or media consumption, so you don't necessarily want to be spending all day, kind of, scanning the news, especially if you're not actually gaining any new or more useful information. And before you might just be perpetuating that anxiety or making it worse. Similarly, I think when you are seeking out information, you want to make sure that you're actually seeking out, you know, reputable trustworthy information so that you can actually act in the appropriate way.

Might be just kind of distracting yourself if need be. I know preferably with something enjoyable like a book, or a show, or a movie, or maybe you know, video chatting with a friend. But certainly, distraction can be a useful tool when we find ourselves hooked in this kind of cycle of unhelpful worry. I'd also mention it's probably helpful to be aware of some of the psychological effects that increased stress, fear and anxiety have on our psychological system. So we know that when we're, when we have elevated fear and anxiety, it changes how our attention functions. So we can develop an increased attentional bias to threat where we are kind of quicker to pick out all the things that appear scary and threatening in our environment. And we maybe gloss over or dismiss things in our environment that, maybe would be run counter to that fear, and that can lead to an escalation of fear and anxiety as well. The last thing I would say is fear has a tendency to overgeneralize, meaning that if there's something in particular that we're afraid of, like a virus or coming into contact with the virus, oftentimes that fear kind of spreads out to things that seem related to it. But that actually are something completely different. And as an example of this, I might think of, you know, fear and anxiety motivated people to go out and buy, say, like enough food to have for a couple of weeks in case we can't go to the grocery store. I also saw some people going out and you know, maybe getting some things that didn't necessarily make logical sense in connection to this particular outbreak. So for instance, like, going and buying up gallons and gallons, and gallons of drinking, of bottled water when you know, our tap water is perfectly safe to drink here. And, and that may be how we prepare for, like, an earthquake or another type of natural disaster where that type of infrastructure might be threatened, but isn't necessarily something that's going to be disrupted from this type of outbreak. Yet, that fear can kind of push us to engage in, kind of, those more general actions. So I think just kinda being aware of that can be helpful to see when those tendencies are getting kicked in by the fear.

Rosemary Walker

Yeah, great. That covered a lot of really good things. And I'll just add a couple more that sort of tie back a little bit to some of the things we've hit on. The first being uncertainty, we've kinda been, that's come up a lot so far and I think, like we've mentioned, uncertainty is a really, is really challenging for a lot of people. People vary. There's a lot of variability in how well people tolerate uncertainty. And like I mentioned before, individuals with anxiety disorders tend to find it even more challenging, usually. And so I think in this, this time, an important first step can be to simply acknowledge how this is a time where there is quite a bit of uncertainty. Uncertainty about how long this is gonna last, about what this will mean for work, and our financial situations, and uncertainty about, you know, potential infection of us or our families. And, instead of, kind of, trying to spin and spin and spin and spin and look for certainty, there can be some relief in trying to sort of just accept the uncertainty for now and tolerate it. Think about other times that you've tolerated uncertainty and how you did that. And with that acceptance, like I said, there can be some relief, and it's also okay to accept the discomfort that comes with the uncertainty and to notice that it's, you know, you don't like it or that, you know, it makes you feel anxious in your body. And so that I think can be a really helpful first step is to sort of give up problem solving, give up, trying to find answers and really, kind of, notice and acknowledge and accept

the uncertainty of the moment right now. Another helpful piece here can be that there's significant evidence to show that people overestimate how badly they will be affected by future negative events, and underestimate how well they will cope with and adjust to difficult situations. So along with the acceptance of the uncertainty, it also can be sort of helpful to remind yourself of that and remind yourself that it's very likely that whatever comes your way in the next few months, getting sick, losing a job, any of those things, it's very likely that you will find a way to get through it. Even if right now you can't imagine that you possibly would be able to. I think another really helpful thing in these moments is, I hear a lot from friends, patients, family, that kind of thought of, "I can't imagine how I would possibly get through this. Another few weeks of this, another few months of this." And sort of the, one of the things that makes it the most difficult is the idea of that it might last for a while. Kind of, this disruption our life as we know it. And I think this is where we can bring in some of our mindfulness techniques and staying in the present moment can really help. So focusing on what can you do in this exact moment and kind of acknowledging that really all you have to do is get through this moment and that can, can really feel a lot easier than thinking about getting through months of this. And we really don't know, right? Again, there's that uncertainty. We don't know. We could see change tomorrow or it could be a few months. And so really all you have to do is stay tied to the present moment and get through the present moment. And then I think a last piece that kinda ties back to some of the challenges people are facing is a lot of us have lost access to things that give us meaning in life. And so how are we not going to fall into hopelessness and helplessness? If we've lost contact with those things that give us meaning, and how can we make meaning out of our life still, given the current circumstances? One thing that we really encourage people to do is try to spend some time thinking about what your values are. So values are personally important principles that are, kind of, you as a, as an individual find intrinsically rewarding. And these vary across individuals, can be things like creativity, learning, compassion, gratitude, social justice, all of those are values. And in this time, it's a really good time to get in contact with those values and think about what can bring these into your life despite the fact that maybe you're homebound, or you aren't able to go to work, or you aren't able to, to spend time with friends if that's your value. And people have gotten really creative with this. You know, and I, I think that there's lots of ideas online you can look up. But first it takes figuring out what your values are and then finding ways to get creative to bring them into your life. Right? So for example, if compassion is a value of yours, can you find a way to bring in four different ways that you get in touch with that value each day? So maybe that's, you know, asking a neighbor who, you know, if you can grocery shop for them or write letters to people who are quarantined, or make drawings. If you have kids at home, have your help your, have your kids make drawings and, and send them to family members or loved ones. Lots of different creative ideas. And one thing, it can be kind of difficult to actually think of these things when you are, when you are feeling low or you are feeling anxious. Because we know that, sort of, our mood impacts how we think. So a really good idea is to actually have you think about these ideas for this and generate a list. And so that in times when you are, maybe your mood has kind of tanked a little bit, you can, kind of, access this list and, and force yourself to kind

of engage in one of these activities, which then we know can have a positive impact in your mood. And schedule them ahead of time. So even if in the moment you don't feel like doing them, it's a part of your kind of planning or part of your day that you've planned, and kind of, do what you can to force yourself to go through with these activities or these ideas that you've had. Because again, we know that that can have a positive impact on your mood.

Erin Welsh Those are wonderful. Thank you.

Erin Updyke Such good advice yeah.

Erin Welsh So, you know, for people who normally see a therapist in person, I know that you mentioned teletherapy, but what are some other resources, or, that they could use during this time, or if someone has never maybe gone to see a therapist in person what are some resources that they could use as well?

Rosemary Walker Yeah. So again, I think a lot of people are uncomfortable with tele-health. So I'll just put in another plug for that, and that it can be really effective. And I think even patients who are sort of resistant at first find that it's actually really nice to connect and easy to connect over through the computer, through the screen. You know, I think there's various platforms for it. Our clinic actually uses the HIPAA compliant zoom, which means that it's all, you know, all of it is protected and you know, not accessible. So, so it's very private. And then a lot of the time, again, there might be little adaptations, but the therapy sessions look largely like therapy sessions look in person. You can, you can see the person through the screen. You know, the therapy sessions usually actually end up feeling, I think very, very familiar and similar to when they're in person. You know, there's a lot, there's things we help people set up, you know, a private place so that they feel like they have privacy. I think that can be a really key component of it. If there's family members or kids around, we might ask that they, you know, step outside or something like that. But it largely looks very similar to therapy in person. But you're just communicating through the computer.

Pete Rosencrans Yeah. I would, I would really echo what Rosie is saying. I mean I've, I've actually been, I was pretty skeptical about how tele-health would go doing therapy over it. I've been surprised at how well it's worked out. I really do think there's a lot of value to it and it's going to be a major tool that we lean on throughout these events that are ongoing. So I would kind just, I would reiterate that plug for at least giving tele-health a try if it's an option to you. And you know, even if it's, let's say you're already in therapy, but for one reason or another, tele-health is not an option for you. You might consider still just reaching out to your therapist and seeing if you can kind of actively make a proactive coping plan together with your therapist for how to navigate that interim period until you're able to resume treatment. And that's probably something that's best done in consultation with someone's individual therapist. Similarly, if you've been in treatment, just kind of remembering what you have learned so far and, you know, rather than this as taking a hiatus from your treatment, to approach it as maybe an opportunity to practice and live with the skills that you've been learning so far. So, not to give up

on those efforts, so you can practice that self-compassion, even if you know, you might struggle to use the skills that you've learned effectively when you're outside of therapy context. And that's okay. And so being compassionate with yourself if, you know, as you're trying to do that. But really trying to keep up practicing those things that you've been learning. And then more broadly, I think if, if you haven't been in treatment, it's probably worth just being on the lookout for really some longer term patterns of mood or emotional behavioral disturbances. Particularly when they get to the point where they're really starting to interfere with their daily activities or your general wellbeing. And that case it might be a sign that it might be worth reaching out for some professional help. And I think that, kind of, resources are being developed on an ongoing basis in terms of where to find tele-health opportunities. But in general, individuals, insurance companies definitely generally have kind of a directory of providers that are, who are in network. Psychology Today, you can also, it has several "find a therapist" tools. I'm not sure if, you know, tele-health option has been built into that search tool yet. And there's some other resources out there where you can kind of search for therapists to explore if telehealth is an option.

Rosemary Walker

I would add. Also, just, you know, and this, this goes back to some of the things Pete was saying about validating that this is a stressful time. And it seems like it's a really good time to, just for everybody to be practicing self-care. So thinking about the things that make you feel relaxed, the things that, that are comforting to you and try to build these into your life as well. And, and simple things too, like good sleep hygiene. There's lots of information on the internet about, you know, good sleep hygiene and sleep is so important. You know, it has a cascading effect on mood and anxiety. Definitely. And anything we can do to kind of buffer against those right now is going to be important. And so, you know, doing things like going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time and you know, limiting screen time before going to bed, things like that can make a really huge difference right now. Taking a bubble bath, if you find that relaxing, anything that you can think of to build into your life right now that can just boost up your, your resilience and buffer against issues with mood and anxiety is going to be really important for everybody.

Erin Updyke

Yeah, that, that makes a lot of sense. And we've kind of talked a little bit and touched on how wide ranging the kind of effects of this are in terms of mental health, socioeconomics, everything. So how can we as individuals help other people during this time? How can we be good neighbors, community members, good leaders while still protecting our own mental health?

Pete Rosencrans

Yeah. So I think this ties into a lot of what we've been talking about. So I think I'm on the most basic level, the advice would be like follow those guidelines that we're getting from the CDC or from your state or County or city public health departments, the departments of health. You know, actually adhere to those guidelines that we know we need to be doing to, you know, keep people healthy and protect those of us are at higher risk. More on the, kind of, psychological or mental health side. The themes that we've seen emerging in terms of how to kind of best go through this process in terms of outlook for our own and our

community members, mental health is to really embrace this attitude of flexibility, kindness, and creativity. So, you know, again, we're all navigating an unprecedented situation and there is bound to be missteps along the way. Trying to take kind of a gracious and flexible attitude to that. Maybe watching out for negative assumptions about people's behavior, and instead kind of considering that, okay, maybe we're all kind of trying to do our best here, navigating an inherently very difficult situation. We're all gonna try to figure this out together. And that involves extending kindness and graciousness to yourself and others, and kind of just accepting that, you know, we're not going to be perfect through this, and that's okay, we're still going to do our best. I think intentionally practicing empathy can be helpful in those situations. Really just embracing those creative ways that we can stay connected to the people we care about and to get creative about how we build in those sources of positivity and reward and things that fulfill our values into our life. I think this is going to entail having to take a pretty open-minded approach to this and being open to some trial and error as we go along. So being willing to maybe try out new, potentially unconventional ways of connecting with other people, whether it's you know, virtual happy hours or watching a movie together over video chat, maybe playing a board game together or virtually, as well as, you know, maybe finding new ways to exercise if you can't go to your normal gym or are having trouble, kind of, getting access to the normal way of the exercise. Maybe it's finding new things that you try out at home or walking around your neighborhood. And maybe those wouldn't have been your first choices up until this point, but it might be worth just taking an open, open minded approach to them and giving them a try to see if they work for you. I think this emotional support aspect is pretty key. So, offering emotional support to others when it's needed or when it's sought out by people you care about, kind of, you know, validating those feelings that are coming up and also seeking out that kind of support when you need it yourself. So if you're seeking someone to kind of process your emotional reactions to things with, or to problem solve with, you know, be proactive about that. Seek someone out who you trust and have that conversation, and that can be really beneficial for everyone involved. And then I think you know, to the extent that we can offer concrete or physical support when it's appropriate to help our communities. So there are some communities who are asking if anybody has, you know, extra N-95 masks at home that they could donate for healthcare workers. Maybe there's philanthropic means in which you can have a positive impact in your community, those types of things. So being on the lookout for really what it's called for by trustworthy, reputable sources, participating in those efforts when you are able to, and just kind of doing your part to engage in these new practices that are being encouraged and to kind of kindly encourage others to do so as well. And just acknowledging that, you know, we're finding a new way to live our lives for this time being. And that's a real challenge for all of us.

Erin Welsh Yeah, thanks. [chuckles] Those are very helpful. So are there some specific resources that you can recommend for some of our listeners who may be struggling during this time? Some specific resources they could seek out?

Pete
Rosencrans

Yes. So I think the two, two big ones are probably ones everybody's heard, which are if you want, you know, reputable information about coronavirus or the COVID-19 itself, the CDC website and the World Health Organization website are two go-to sources that are reputable and generally up to date. More on the mental health side. There's actually a lot out there. So, in general we'd probably recommend making sure that you're consulting trustworthy sources, government websites, professional organizations, as opposed to maybe taking mental health advice from social media, or from memes that you see posted, or from non-mental health professionals. So there are a lot of those professional organizations out there. Some of them that we have come across that have COVID-19 specific information on there that we liked one was ADAA- dot-org. That's the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. On their, if you go to their front page of their website, they have an entire section devoted to a helpful advice for dealing with coronavirus anxiety, and it's a great resource to consult. Another one would be SAMHSA or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. So that's S-A-M-H-S-A-dot-gov. Similarly, they have a wealth of COVID-19 related mental health information right on their front page there. A good place to consult as well.

[Musical
Interlude]

Erin Welsh

Thank you again so, so much to Rosie and Pete. We appreciate you taking the time. And honestly, like it's, I can't tell you how much better I think we both felt, both during the recording, and then when I was editing it, like, I almost cried several times because I was just like, oh, "I feel validated, I feel like I understand more about why I'm feeling this way." And the importance of, you know, practicing these coping strategies.

Erin Updyke

Erin, I almost cried during the interview!

Erin Welsh

Yeah! [laughter] That's a good thing! I mean, I think that's a good thing.

Erin Updyke

[laughter] it is a good thing.

Erin Welsh

I think we've been, you know, just like barreling ahead...

Erin Updyke

mmhm.

Erin Welsh

...thinking about this constantly.

Erin Updyke

Yeah.

Erin Welsh

And recognizing that it may not be a helpful thing to do was very important. And so, hopefully you will find what they have said very interesting or relevant or helpful as well.

Erin Updyke Absolutely. And, one of the things that they mentioned was that, for some people who feel like you want to be doing something to help, if you are one of those people, Ologies is putting out a great episode where Alie interviewed Dr. Michael Wells , who put together a, kind of database of scientists who want to volunteer to help. So, check out that episode of Ologies if you want more detail on that, as well as links to, kind of, sign up for that, if you are person who is interesting in helping out in that way. So, yeah!

Erin Welsh Awesome. Well,

Erin Updyke This isn't going to be the last, I'm sure, episode.

Erin Welsh No, this will definitely not be the last episode. And we, you know, I think that one of the things that has really been illustrated by this pandemic, by the coverage of it, by doing this research on it is that, pandemics, public health, these are so multifaceted it's hard to comprehend and it's hard to cover in a very efficient or effective way . And so, what we're trying to do is, kind of, reach each one of these different aspects of disease. And so, as we learn more, we may revisit aspects of the clinical disease, or the vaccine development, or the epidemiological patterns. But we also want to bring in some other things too. So hopefully we'll bring you episodes on the economic impacts of this. On how this disease or outbreaks like this work in countries that do not have the resources like the United States and other more wealthy countries have. So keep an ear out for those, subscribe to our social medias. TPWKY is our twitter, This Podcast Will Kill You - Instagram, and, you know, we're also on Facebook under This Podcast Will Kill You. And we also have a website where we're going to post FAQs and we're going to post updates and we're going to post new episodes as we have them. So.

Erin Updyke As well as transcripts for all of these coronavirus episodes. We're working on transcripts for the past episodes as well. And, yeah, if you're not subscribed to our feed already on whatever podcatcher you use, make sure you are. 'Cause I don't know when these new updates are coming, but they're coming! [chuckles]

Erin Welsh They're coming, yeah. We're just gonna do them as a, as they get ready kind of a basis. So. Anyway, well thanks again to Rosie and Pete for the amazing discussion that we had with them.

Erin Updyke Absolutely. And thank you to Bloodmobile for providing the music for this and all of our episodes.

Erin Welsh And thank you to you, listeners. We hope that you enjoyed this episode and this series so far as much as we have enjoyed putting them together

Erin Updyke And if you have more topics that you want for us to cover, shoot us an email, thispodcastwillkillyou@gmail.com!

Erin Welsh Absolutely! Well, until next time, wash your hands...

Erin Updyke ...you filthy animals!

[musical outro]