

COVID-19 Pandemic:
Caring for the Carers Webinar Series

Wounds Canada Supporting Our Health-care Community

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When the COVID-19 pandemic began to affect an increasing number of Canadians, Wounds Canada considered the implications for health-care systems and investigated ways it could support health-care professionals (HCPs) working on the front lines. Wounds Canada developed a series of webinars in which the participants themselves would dictate the discussion, explain their thoughts and concerns, and ask questions in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

In April 2020, the webinar series COVID-19 Pandemic: Caring for the Carers was launched. The series was hosted by Heather Orsted and Jackie Hickey, both nurses with collective experience living through the outbreaks of the HIV/AIDS, SARS and H1N1 pandemics. Expert panelists

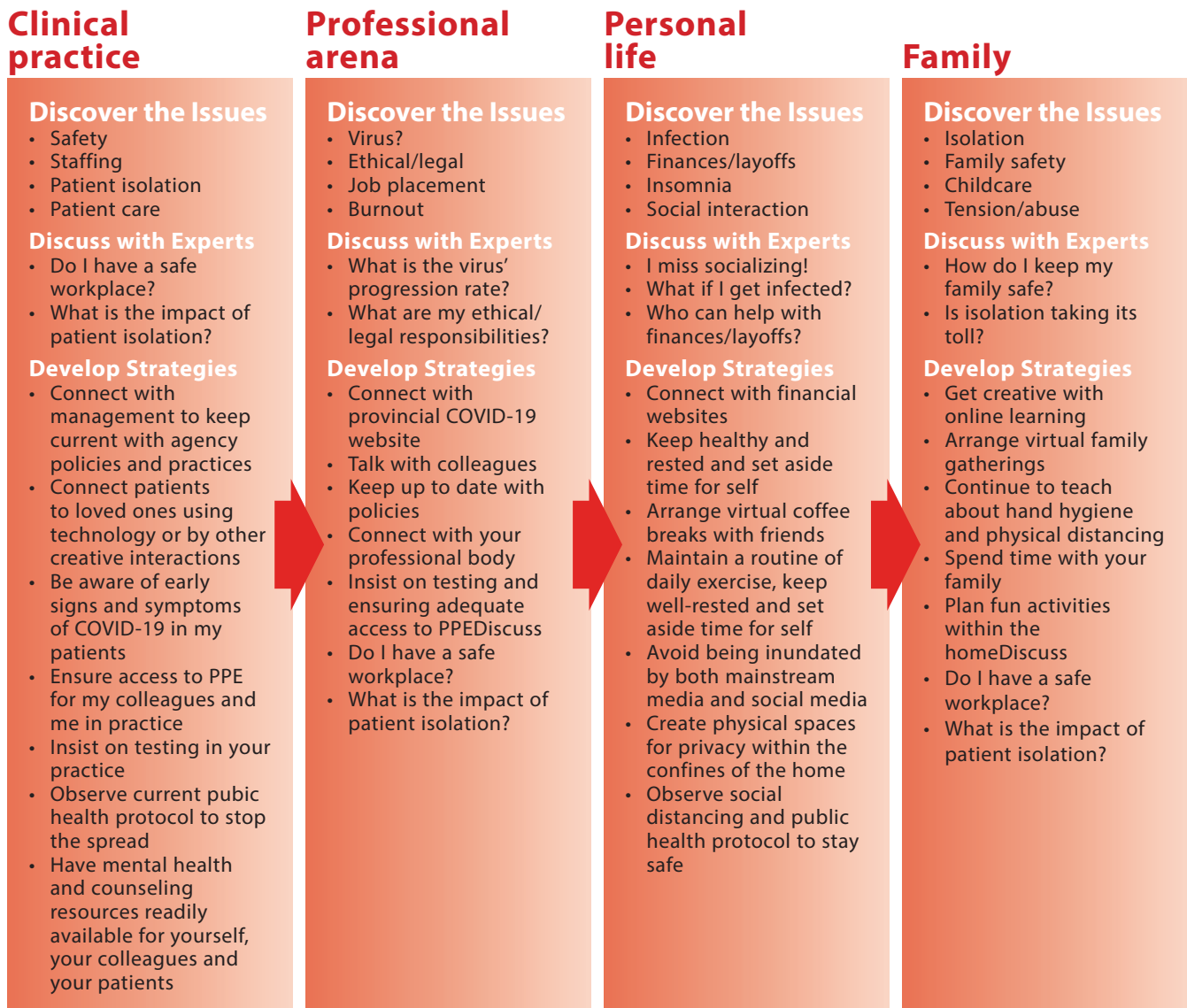
Noha George, Janet Kuhnke and Ranjani Somayaji shared insights and thoughtful commentary, and offered strategies intended to lessen anxiety levels and provide concrete steps for coping with the pandemic.

The webinar series was inspired by Ian Henschke's model,¹ which is based on identifying issues, delving into details and developing coping strategies. It comprised three webinars, each with a specific focus:

- Discover the Concerns
- Discuss with Experts
- Develop Strategies

There was time scheduled between the sessions to allow the facilitators, panel and participants to reflect on the discussions and determine the specific topics on which the subsequent webinars would be focused (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Navigating a Pandemic



Not surprisingly, the first webinar, Discover the Concerns, revealed many serious issues facing HCPs in both their professional and personal lives. Participants had a chance to voice their opinions and answer a series of polling questions to state their concerns, in four distinct areas: clinical practice, professional arena, personal life and family. The following indicates their primary concerns:

Clinical practice:

- Safety with lack of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Emotional impact of patient isolation
- Ability to provide good basic care
- Staffing shortages

Professional arena:

- Future course of the virus
- Moving from usual role into another role
- Ethical and legal implications

of patient care with lack of resources

- Burnout

Personal life:

- Social engagement and volunteering
- Risk to own health
- Financial issues and layoffs
- Insomnia

Family:

- Infecting loved ones
- Confinement of the family

- Child care
- Tension/Abuse

These concerns were then explored in greater depth in the second session, Discuss with the Experts, where panelists provided their insights into a range of topics such as safety in the workplace, virus progression rates, impact of patient isolation, legal and ethical responsibilities, loneliness, fear of getting infected or transmitting infection to family members, financial stresses, worries about layoffs, and the significant emotional and mental toll of the pandemic. Panelists explored and answered many questions, and participants related their personal experiences. Throughout the engaging and thought-provoking session, it was apparent that no one was alone in their concerns and in the anxiety they were experiencing.

In session three, Discovering Strategies, participants and panelists discussed resources and coping methods. To address the clinical and professional concerns, it was recommended they:

- Connect with management and colleagues to keep current with agency policies and practices related to COVID-19
- Contact their professional bodies to keep up to date with their colleges' policies
- Encourage patients to identify and talk about their feelings.
- Help patients and families find personal and creative ways to stay emotionally connected to reduce the impact of isolation
- Continue to teach and

reinforce hand hygiene and physical distancing

- Access reliable and current COVID-19 resources

To address well-being, both physically and mentally, it was recommended they:

- Keep a healthy routine and diet and be mindful of getting adequate rest and exercise daily
- Encourage timeouts (to go for a walk, read a book, listen to music) and ensure family members know that this is needed "space"
- Create physical spaces for privacy within the confines of the home
- Arrange virtual coffee breaks with friends and family to reduce the impact of isolation within the home
- Plan fun activities within the household
- Get creative with online learning and pursue hobbies
- Avoid being inundated by both mainstream media and social media (and take an occasional day off from media and technology)
- Access recognized and reputable financial and/or emotional/mental health resources

A series of [resource links](#) and [a tip sheet](#) were prepared to help participants stay current on COVID-19 and explore professional, health-care, government, financial and mental health information and guidance.

These resources can be accessed on the Wounds Canada website. Each session of the Caring for the Carers series is available on the [Webinar Archive page](#). 📄

The Panel

Noha George, RP MSW RSW, is a registered psychotherapist and clinical social worker who has been practising in Ontario for 25 years. Since 1995, she has journeyed with individuals, couples and families who have experienced trauma, with the goal of facilitating hope and healing and planting new beginnings.



Her clinical experience includes working within the not-for-profit sector, the inpatient hospital rehabilitation setting and the private sector.

Janet L. Kuhnke, RN BA BScN MSc ET PhD, is a registered nurse of 35 years. She is a Nurse Specialized in Wound, Ostomy, Continence Care (NSWOCC), and an assistant professor of Baccalaureate Nursing at Cape Breton University.



Her doctorate in psychology focused on quality of life and mental health and wellness of patients living with chronic diabetic foot ulcers.

Ranjani Somayaji, BScPT, MD, MPH, FRCPC, is an infectious disease specialist with Alberta Health Services who has clinical expertise in the care of persons with chronic wounds. Her research is focused on understanding the risk for and impact of acute and chronic infections on populations.





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