



Hamilton, March 17, 2020

Dear colleagues,

As you are aware, the COVID-19 outbreak is impacting our regular services at the Child and Youth Mental Health Program. In particular, our outpatient and non-essential services are expected to **close at the end of the day on March 18**, until further notice.

As physicians and nurse practitioners who refer patients to our program or whose patients are involved in our clinic, we would like to communicate the following information to you:

1. Starting today, we are **cancelling all appointments for new cases** in our outpatient programs at both Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre (for primarily Hamilton residents) and McMaster Children's Hospital /MUMC site (for primarily regional residents).
2. Patients who are already followed in our program will have all appointments this week **rescheduled or converted into virtual (OTN or phone) appointments**.
3. We will **pause processing all referrals of new cases** at this time, coming from either physicians or NP's (also known as "psych consults"), or CONTACT agencies. Please **do not submit any new referrals** while the clinic is closed. **Referrals received during this period will not be reviewed:** we will only be able to review them once the clinic reopens, and these referrals will be prioritized for intake as clinically necessary, taking into consideration our current waiting lists.
4. **Regular outpatient services will not be provided at this time.** This includes psychotherapy treatments (both individual and group), home visits and psychiatric assessments.
5. We will, however, offer **planned risk assessments for our currently followed patients that we consider high-risk**, using primarily virtual tools (phone and OTN). We will proactively reach out to this subgroup of patients, as identified by their current clinicians. Please note that these brief assessments will be focused on support and any immediate risk while current therapy is on hold.
6. For all patients under our care currently, regardless of being identified as high risk or not, we are implementing a **Risk Support Team** composed of psychiatrists, psychologists and clinicians. Please note this will be available **only to patients we are currently caring for**, not to new patients. We will inform our patients that they can call **905.521.2100 ext 77621** and leave a message with detailed information about their mental health concerns. We will remotely monitor this phone line and respond as quickly as possible, within the hours of 9-5, Monday to Friday. As health care providers, you can also use the above number to reach the Risk Support Team if you have any concerns.

Please note that this line will **not be monitored live** during the hours of operation, so it is **NOT to be used for urgent or emergent concerns**.

7. We hope to provide ongoing support for prescription renewal requests coming to our clinic even during these challenging times. Our regular outpatient fax numbers will be forwarded to a central fax at our inpatient unit, since we anticipate that our inpatient unit will remain open. Thus, **all requests for prescription renewal will be directed to the following fax number: 905.577.8499**. Given the limited access to psychiatric services, delay may occur. We will attempt to communicate this to local and regional pharmacies, but **we appreciate your help providing prescription renewals** to our shared patients in case these patients and their pharmacies cannot reach us.
8. We hope that the above measures will help us guarantee that our outpatients will continue to do well and stay safe, without requiring a visit to the Emergency Room during the COVID-19 outbreak. In any case, please be assured that at this time **our urgent, emergent and inpatient mental health services are open and available to patients and their families**, including McMaster Children's Hospital Emergency Department.

Other services that remain available to help manage mental health crises in children and youth include **COAST (905.972.8338)** and **Kids Help Phone (1.800.668.6868 or kidshelpphone.ca)**

Thank you very much for your support to our vulnerable youth and their families during these challenging times. If you have any specific questions, feel free to email me at sassi@hhsc.ca, or tweet me @RobertoSassi.

Sincerely,

Roberto Sassi, MD

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McMaster Children's Hospital