Adapting to COVID-19: Teaching and Practice Adaptations to Support Student Mental Health and Wellbeing
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Jonny Morris – Canadian Mental Health Association BC Division

Contents

Opening

Johnny Morris:

Great. Lovely to be here virtually. With many of you ... I just took a quick look through the participant list, and great to see some names that are very familiar from my previous lives in campus mental health, and good to see some new names. It's great to make your acquaintance. My name's Johnny Morris, and I work as the CEO at the Canadian Mental Health Association's provincial office, the BC division, and I'm very privileged and honored to be here today to facilitate some dialogue related to adapting to COVID-19 teaching and practice adaptations to support student mental health and wellbeing. Thank you very much indeed to Duane and BCcampus, Paula behind the scenes, and the invitation from Duane and the team to be here with you today.

Territorial Acknowledgement

Johnny Morris:

If we go to the next slide, really important, even in these virtual spaces, that we are inhabiting to acknowledge the territories on which we're practicing this afternoon. I'm speaking from the traditional unceded territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ and Lekwungen-speaking peoples, and I'm humbled by the opportunity to both live, learn, play, and work on these territories here. I know many of you are calling from many other territories this afternoon, and for us to hold that acknowledgement closely, particularly given the dialogue and the conversation that we're going to be entering into.

Introduction

Johnny Morris:

So, what's in store this afternoon on the next slide here, what do we have at play? Well, first, for those of who perhaps haven't heard much about the Canadian Mental Health Association, we are not to be confused with the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which is often how our letters get muddled up. We've been around for about 103 years now and one of the most established national charitable organizations in the country.

Johnny Morris:

We hold a vision of mentally healthy people and a healthy society. Through the work we in advocacy, education, and training, direct services and support, our focus is really trying to achieve the conditions for mental health for all. We really hang onto the idea that mental health is a human right and that we can do things where we live, where we learn, where we work, and where we play to enable all of us, including those of us who experience the effects of marginalization or vulnerability, to achieve the best mental health possible. Also in the work here in British Columbia, substance use and additions are part of the mandate that we hold. We have 14 branches across the province, and many of those branches intersect with local post-secondary institutions, and they can be a huge wealth of resources for the populations you serve as student service and academic leaders.

Johnny Morris:

So, this afternoon for the next 55 minutes or so, on the next slide kind of covers the ground that I hope to cover with you. For the first part of the session, my aim is to catch you up on a recent tranche of survey data that we, CMHA National and UBC, have collected, which I think has some very important bearing upon the populations that you serve, both student, staff, and faculty at post-secondaries across the province.

Johnny Morris:

I want to spend some time very much in a dialogue with the 43 participants or so around some of the questions that you are likely already thinking through, all with the aim of centering the imperative that we think about mental health and substance use at the heart of the public health response in light of COVID-19. So, there's a series of animating questions that we'll have a bit of dialogue around.

Johnny Morris:

Then toward the end, I'm bringing back forward a resource that Drs. Cheryl Washburn, Rita Knodel, and Su-Ting Teo, amongst many, many others created as an exemplar planning framework to support you to have conversations on your campuses as you start to move through this campus. You likely, given where we're at, have done lots of this thinking and planning, but hopefully it's an opportunity to intentionally pose some of the planning questions we all need to do in our workplaces and learning spaces in light of the profound impacts that COVID-19 is having upon our mental health. So, that's the plan for today.

Johnny Morris:

I did receive a listing of plan takeaways from many of you who are attending, and so we'll reserve some time to cover off some of that ground at the end. Recognize we won't get to all of those questions, but I think there will be opportunities for us to gather again, whether it be with BCcampus or separately through Healthy Minds Healthy Campuses to continue this important planning and action going forward. So, hopefully that's in keeping of your expectations this afternoon.

Effects of COVID-19

Johnny Morris:

If we go to the next slide here ... So, we completed some research earlier on just as things across the country were starting to reopen. In partnership with the University of British Columbia and CMHA National, we commissioned a national survey, and we attracted 3,000 respondents to that national survey in partnership with Maru/Matchbox, which is a national polling agency. The survey was one of the first to really look beyond people's self-reporting mental health and substance use problems alone and really took a look at how mental health and substance use and what people endorsed in this survey relate to key drives of mental health and wellbeing. So, we had questions about housing and income security, disability, parenting and caregiving status to drive a set of results that have enabled us to report on some very important vulnerabilities that I think have bearing in the post-secondary environment.

Johnny Morris:

So, what you're looking at here are a breakdown of what we saw across the number of categories, and nationally just shy of 40% of people at this point in time, which would have been in and around May/June, indicated that their mental health had declined due to the impacts of COVID-19 and particular likely the public health responses, the unintended consequences of the public health responses. So, these are very important public health responses, but I think there's an understanding with our public health office here in British Columbia and beyond that they've had a mental health impact.

Johnny Morris:

Just over 46% indicating experiences of anxiety or worry, 14% indicating some trouble coping. Of course of note and concern, 6% having had experience with suicidal thoughts, and that's particularly salient, given that today is World Suicide Prevention Day. And 2% had tried to harm themselves in response to COVID-19. So, sobering statistics in that there have been quite a number of surveys done about mental health, and we're about to launch the second wave in a few weeks. It will be important to see how these numbers have shifted.

Johnny Morris:

On the next slide, what you can see here ... And I think this is very important for you as academic and student service leaders and students. COVID-19 and the impact of COVID-19 has made things worse for those who are already vulnerable. I think this is a very common understanding that the pandemic has revealed significant inequity in how people are affected, and the recovery phase, or the phase that we're entering in into, will likely need to have equity very much at the forefront of our planning. And of course inequity exists on campuses of higher education across this province as well.

Johnny Morris:

So, I think before COVID-19 hit, all of you in post-secondaries, and we have for over a decade, have been making the call for sustained and intentional action. Some would describe campuses experiencing a mental health crisis before COVID even hit. Arguably, and a point I make in a few minutes, we are now seeing a collision of a public health pandemic, COVID-19, an opioid overdose crisis, which campuses are not immune to, and the pre-existing issues that we've all been grappling with around post-secondary mental health.

Johnny Morris:

Here what you can see, people already struggling with their mental health were two times more likely to indicate that their mental health had declined, were three times more likely to be having trouble coping, four times more likely to indicate having experienced suicidal thoughts, and an indication there of 46% who are saying that they're feeling depressed. So, as you think through, if you're a ... I know we've got some counselors on the line. If you think through the people that you serve typically as part of your student services portfolio in residence, in classrooms, in counseling, in financial aid, we would argue that the folks who are known to be living with a mental health problem have likely been impacted more so but also recognizing that, if anything, the pandemic has democratized distress. It's led to a conversation about mental health and wellbeing that is much more amplified than previously.

Johnny Morris:

On the next slide here, just in this rundown, you can see here that, whilst the point I just made, the pandemic has affected everyone in some way, people are being affected disproportionately. So, if we look here, 6% of the general population had suicidal thoughts since the outbreak of COVID-19. 18% of people already struggling with their mental health also did to. Of note, people who self-identified as having a disability have been disproportionately impacted and have indicated having suicidal thoughts. 14% where income security is an issue, and 16% of people who are indigenous.

Johnny Morris:

So, here what we've tried to do is demonstrate that people who experience marginalization vulnerability or experience due to systemic problems, like the actual problems with the system, challenges in accessing care for a host of reasons that I think we're all very clear on, this is a particularly important issue to address.

Johnny Morris:

Paula, on the next slide ... Well, I'm finally here ... What I'll do is, before commenting on Dr. Santa Ono is hopefully just in summary, a bit of a chapter summary for the material I've just suggested. My hope for you as listeners and viewers is there's been some useful information in that around making the case for why mental health and substance use should be absolutely at the center in many ways in post-secondaries' efforts of reopening, whether it be through virtual instruction or limited, in-person instruction going forward. Clearly there is an importance there to attend to not only the general student or staff or faculty population but also the need to address to populations within those general groupings that have been disproportionately impacted.

An Example of Leadership

Johnny Morris:

This is a segue, and I'll stop speaking just in and around 2:00, and we'll start to engage with each other. I highlight here Dr. Santa Ono who's the president of UBC, as many of you know. He was a keynote speaker at one of our Healthy Minds Healthy Campuses events several years ago, has been very open about his lived and direct experience of mental health problems, and in many ways has been a beacon, as the most senior administrator at UBC, the president, in I think humanizing, personalizing, and empathizing with students in distress.

Johnny Morris:

This is an op-ed that he released a couple of days ago at the Vancouver Sun. If you haven't seen it, really encourage you to check it out. It's an example for you to hold up at your own institutions of the power of senior administrative voice in tone-setting and change around mental health and addictions, and it's a good example of Dr. Ono signaling to returning UBC students that they aren't alone, and in some ways normalizing the fact that we are having pretty normal reactions to a very abnormal set of circumstances that we are experiencing.

Johnny Morris:

I'd encourage that we can go further than what Dr. Ono is describing, and I think UBC and other institutions are doing this in thinking through everything from the policy work that we have to do through to the crisis management work that we have to do in service of students, staff, and faculty mental health going forward.

Key Issues

Johnny Morris:

So, what I'm going to show you next on the slide are a series of questions, but before we get there, I just want to kind of underscore three key issues that I think should be at the forefront of us as advocates in my world and yourselves as constituents of post-secondary life in your world. I would argue, and I think others have ... There was a writer, Rebecca Harrison, at Insider Higher Education this week who was commenting on the recent experiences at the Cornell University. I've adapted and borrowed their questions, because I think they're very, very good. The argument that they make, and I would absolutely concur with, is this idea of a collision, that there is a collision of the mental health and substance use impacts of COVID-19 and the public health response and the existing campus mental health need.

Johnny Morris:

So, I see that as an employer with 100 staff in my organization, and my colleagues with another 700 staff, where within workplaces we've had of course a significant urgency around the mental health of staff and employees. And when you layer in a new regime of work and what we're experiencing, there's a compounding there that we need to be attentive to. It's not to overwhelm us, but we need to attend to it and plan accordingly.

Johnny Morris:

We must remember that, prior to COVID, BIPOC folks, so black, indigenous, people of color, folks living with disability, populations who were experiencing disproportionate health impacts are experiencing them even more significantly now. And of course, in light of recent protests and recent increases of the profile around those disparities, again, where race isn't the risk factor but racism and systemic oppression are the risk factors, where we've seen that, and we've seen that at a high profile level in Canada, particularly at the interface point between police, law enforcement, and people in distress. And we've commented publicly on that. So, we have to attend to that in our thinking and our planning.

Johnny Morris:

Many of you know me and in my time in the Healthy Minds Healthy Campuses movement know that with colleagues, like Dan Reese and Tim Dyck at the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research and leading thinkers like Martin Mroz and Cheryl and others. And I'm naming them publicly, because they've publicly commented alongside us in things like the Okanagan Charter or the Post-Secondary Systemic Guide to Mental Health. There is an opportunity to adopt a socio-ecological approach, and I think it behooves us probably even more than ever before to think through socio-ecologically what we do next.

Johnny Morris:

And people might say, "Well, what do you mean by that?" I mean it's possible to intervene with individuals. So, it's possible to intervene with students in your virtual classroom, so early recognition, noticing changes in behavior, responding with care, so that basic mental health response, through to intervening with your policies at the level of your registrar. So, when you're thinking through reading weeks and academic breaks, when you're thinking through how learning in this environment fundamentally takes a different psychological toll than in a classroom, what do your withdrawal policies, grading policies, probation policies, financial aid policies all say and do to reflect the current era that we're in? I'm hoping to pepper some of that thinking later today.

Key Questions 1

Johnny Morris:

The questions on the next slide here that I'd encourage us to think ... And, again, these are inspired by this writer Harrison who was featured a few weeks ago in the publication Inside Higher Education. These are questions that I'll just pose for a moment, and then what I'd invite people to do using the chat box here is to encourage you to start to pepper in some responses in the chat if you're comfortable. Both Duane and I will call out some of those responses. And once I'm through, we'll open up some deliberate space for people to unmute themselves to just for a few minutes signal a response to this question. This isn't to put anyone on the spot, but you might say, "This is a question, Johnny, we've been thinking about for months." Great." Or "This is a question ... Yeah, we need to start thinking about this. It'd be great to hear some feedback from you as a group of participants."

Johnny Morris:

So, I think this question is a powerful and beautiful one. How is your campus centering mental health and substance use care as part of your pandemic public health response? And I think there is a great opportunity, and we do this as we call upon government to do this, is to absolutely ensure that the mental health impacts are not invisibilized or put to one side when we think about recovery in this province. We have significant concern about deaths of despair related to economic implications. So, we really do need to center mental health and substance use.

Johnny Morris:

How would you assess the readiness and capacity of your campus to respond to not only the mental health of the students you serve but also the staff and the faculty who make up the fabric of your campus community? What is the readiness there as we head into the fall and the winter? What can we do collectively and collaboratively to support each other to ensure that, yes, you've got your sanitization plans in place ... What are you going to do ...

Johnny Morris:

Camosun College, for example, I'm not sure if any of the team from Camosun are on, were in the press this week, their campus press, because they've moved towards a stepped care model of counseling service delivery. Many of you have moved that way too with a different model of appointment booking and service, because they predict a surge of interest. So, those are questions that we can ponder together.

Johnny Morris:

What provisions have been made to enhance in-person or virtual access to counseling or supports or financial aid or housing support, et cetera? And how will those services respond to disproportionately impacted populations? I watched the international student webinar just to get a taste of things, and it was fascinating and great to see colleagues there describe the very profound efforts that they're making to support wellness amongst international students. This raises the issue of, if you've got international students who haven't been able to return to campus to learn, how do you provide psychosocial support to them at a distance, particularly if they're in their home country?

Q&A 1

Johnny Morris:

So, I'm going to stop here and see if anyone would like to type in a response to one of these questions and if anyone would like to unmute themselves and respond. I might put Duane on the spot, just because he's lived this world alongside me and just see Duane as a co-host here. Do you have an initial response to any of the questions that I'm posing?

Duane:

It's been interesting, Johnny. We've been holding webinars since April 30th, and the common theme throughout is how we support students and how we shift our thinking about what's reasonable to ask of them, during COVID especially, as we move into the fall semester. I think I see many people in the room today that have been with us through the summer that have been working on these very challenges and trying to understand how they might better support the students. It's be really interesting to hear if anybody could talk about shifts they've made to address this and this is what they've received to do that.

Johnny Morris:

Thank you, Duane. Would anyone like to chime in?

Felicity Blaiklock:

Hi. It's Felicity Blaiklock here at North Island College. Sorry. Can you hear me?

Johnny Morris:

I can, Felicity. A pleasure to meet you. Hello, Felicity. Hi. Go ahead.

Felicity Blaiklock:

Hi. Hi, Johnny. I think, like many others, we started off with the words of Bonnie Henry, that whole "Be kind," and I think that was so important, the idea of being compassionate, at the very, very beginning of the pandemic. Again, like many others, we tried to respond with a lot of self-care, both to our student population and also to our colleagues, the others who are also reeling and dealing with things both personally and professionally with all of the changes. So, what that meant was a lot of emails, a lot of the supports that were sent out. And I think those were very well received, but as you know there can also be fatigue also around suddenly getting a whole lot of emails, and even the supportive ones can sometimes seem a little overwhelming when your email is filling up.

Felicity Blaiklock:

We kind of moved from that in still doing our weekly updates for students with a focus on information and on self-care, care and compassion tips, and continuing to promote our support services, which at that point had all gone virtual, and supporting people if they had any question. Because that was the thing as well, because people just had general questions and needed responses. So, we tried to put as many ways as possible that a student could ask a question. There was no wrong door, no wrong email address. So, hoping to just relieve or alleviate some of that stress at that particular time.

Felicity Blaiklock:

As we move into the fall, looking at different types of activities and programming that also supports mental health. We're going to be promoting Mental Health Awareness Week from the 5th to the 10th of October and including our launch, because we've formerly adopted the Okanagan Charter that time as well. So, as you said, front and center is our response to mental health and building resilience capacity and how we do this together. Right?

Johnny Morris:

Well, that's so great to hear you describe that, Felicity, and in so many ways what I took from what you were saying, from the outset, there was this notion of students being able to ask once and to get help fast. There was no wrong door. And your emphasis on that and your ability to adapt when there was that communication fatigue that you described I think is very much an important learning for all of us here, that there is no playbook for what we're doing. The need to adapt and evolve and be responsive is so key. I mean, I can hear, and I heard from one of your trustees today, about your implementation of the Okanagan Charter. It happens to be on my board too. Which is very exciting, because it's kind of a centering of mental health and substance use care very publicly with action behind it as you move into the fall. So, thank you, Felicity.

Johnny Morris:

Would there be any other voices who could kind of in a similar way to Felicity chime in here with a response to these initial questions I have up on the screen?

Duane:

There is a question that has come up in the text box. I'm not sure. Would you like to ask your question, or would you like us to read it for you?

Johnny Morris:

Oh, I can see it here. Just for those who may not be able to see it, "At my institution, many of my colleagues are expressing their own struggles with mental health. It is difficult to support students effectively during times of such uncertainty." I very much respect and hold up this disclosure, this piece that's been offered here of how many of us who, many of you too, are first responders. You're in frontline service or frontline teaching or frontline support roles. I think the comment alludes to what I said earlier. All of us have been impacted to some degree at the level of our mental health by what's happening.

Johnny Morris:

So, I think as a pivot from that question, I think it behooves administrations to think through the equivalent of that oxygen mask, that cliché, the oxygen mask of what's in place to ensure ready psychological support, ready psychological protection to staff and faculty who themselves have had to pivot in how to change instruction, cope with changes in policy and students. And I think there's a whole them there that we could explore together about how institutions can support their employees as well. I really appreciate that comment.

Duane:

Sarah has a question that she's willing to [inaudible 00:28:55]

Johnny Morris:

Go ahead.

Sarah:

Hi, Johnny. Not so much a question as sort of an attempt to answer these really thought-provoking questions. I feel that at Okanagan College the communications that have been going out from our public affairs department have really tried to weave in information about mental health supports and [inaudible 00:29:17] services at the college and in the community from the start. So, that's been heartening to see.

Sarah:

And in terms of our department trying to improve and enhance access to our virtual services, we're not doing in-person counseling this year, or at least this semester. We have a new web form for booking counseling appointments. It just so happened that we were due for a website update. And that has really ... We've seen an uptick in students requesting appointments, because it's just so much easier than having to even write an email or call. So, that's been a positive change.

Sarah:

We did notice a decrease in student sessions in the spring. We're not sure what it'll look like in the fall, but we have noticed that ... Well, noticed. We think that maybe ... It's kind of a hypothesis that maybe students would like to have a space to drop in. Because of that fatigue that everyone's talking about, the one-on-one session might not feel like a fit for everyone. So, we're rolling out a group workshop series called Grow@OC, which will be focusing on developing resilience as well as academic study skills and giving students a chance to connect. We're hoping that then that could be a way for students to become comfortable with our department and seek help if needed.

Sarah:

I think that support for employees is a bit of a weak spot in our institution and actually in other ones that I've worked at too. I don't want to just point the finger. But we do have the [inaudible 00:30:54] Project which is open for students and employees. We hold the space in a way where we just get real about the fact that we all have our mental health to take care of and invite folks to be really open and honest about the challenges of this time. So, that's sort of a snapshot of what's going on at our institution.

Johnny Morris:

Well, Sarah, I so appreciate the generosity with which you've just shared those pieces. My sense is that, from those of you who know me, I'm loath to just talk at groups of people for 60 minutes. I try to bring this community of practice feel, and so to hear ... There's a link that people might form peer to peer, Sarah, with the inroads you've made with virtual provisioning of service and how you've actually done tactically the booking process, which is a challenge for some campuses, particularly those that have fewer on-campus counseling resources or have to refer to the community. I think good to hear you resonate and maybe underscore the earlier comment about what we can do more for employees. And maybe that's something sector organizations like mine can assist with, with pointing staff and faculty to off-campus resources beyond EFAP programs, which of course are very important, to shore up to health and wellbeing. So, thank you Sarah so much for that. Thank you.

Sarah:

My pleasure.

Johnny Morris:

Oh, yes, Diana? Yeah. Diana, did you want to speak your comment in, or did you want to ... Well, actually, I'm putting you on the spot here. You can type your response [inaudible 00:32:28]

Duane:

Diana's ready to go.

Diana:

I'm ready to go. Thank you, Johnny. It's nice to see you. I've been working in an area where it's been about building capacity of faculty and staff to support student wellbeing for quite a few years now. And just over the summer I think with educators, with instructors revising their courses, trying to adapt and adjust everything online, it's given this opportunity for them to think about how they might build in ways to support student wellbeing into their courses, may it be providing resources in their messages to students to actually using different instructional practices or adjusting the curriculum in ways that support student wellbeing in the online world.

Diana:

So, as challenging as these times have been, I think there's also been a really great opportunity for folks to actually take a moment, step back, and think about how might I bring this priority into the learning environment. That's been really exciting to see in my work over the summer is that interest and engagement. That hasn't quite been at this level before.

Johnny Morris:

Yeah. Well, it's great to hear. Before we move onto these next questions, Diana, you situate that case study of what's happening at your institution, UBC ... Hopefully I'm still placing your place of work accurately. I think embedded in what you're saying is such an opportunity for peer support and mutual aid between institutions, which we'll get to that later on in the session today. Great to see how your colleagues and yourself have been able to grab some of that momentum and co-align instructional change alongside mental health and wellbeing in such a powerful way. So, thanks, Diana, for that.

Key Questions 2

Johnny Morris:

Paula, if you might go to the next slide here, just to kind of tackle just this next set of questions, which are hopefully again designed to, as Sarah said earlier, provoke some good conversation. In this article that I was reading, and I agreed with it too, this notion that bereavement support takes on a whole other light in the context of what we're experiencing right now. Here in British Columbia, very fortuitously we've had ... And of course any loss of life is terribly, terribly sad. Comparatively with other jurisdictions, for a whole host of reasons, the loss of life has been controlled. But there are many folks out there who might be worried about bereavement. To be ready and prepared for bereavement supports and services I think is something for us to think through.

Johnny Morris:

I think of Duane's work over the years and others around those protocols that we can have in place around enacting rapid responses, particularly in virtual environments if a campus experiences loss. I think kind of refreshing your approaches to bereavement via suicide or bereavement through other kinds of loss is important to be ready in communities for any of that very, very unfortunate and tragic outcome that we might see. Many campuses are well-positioned to do that, because they've thought this through, often under the auspices of threat assessment and behavioral conduct committees. But I would encourage you to really ensure that services and supports around bereavement are active and thought through well.

Johnny Morris:

For campuses that have residence life, I thought this might lead to a couple of minutes of good conversation here of thinking through those of you that do have residences, how quarantining and isolation is going to be handled in those residence spaces. For me, I stepped onto UVic's campus 20 years ago to the week practically. And when I read the articles about what students are entering into now, it is of course completely different. Thinking about the heightened physical and psychological risks for residence life staff for those of you who have had students return to campus in limited ways would be something that would be very important to consider.

Johnny Morris:

And I think here consideration around and engagement from us, and we'd be happy to support you through the Healthy Minds Healthy Campuses community, is recognizing all of these seismic shifts that campuses have experienced over the summer and are likely to continue to experience into the fall semester around that taken for granted access to group dining, for students to actively gather in canteen spaces. Residence cafeterias are such a taken for granted thing and often provide such an opportunity for connection and social support and mutual aid.

Johnny Morris:

So, reduced access to these taken for granted social activities in campus environments is something that can't be replicated fully online, but to hear Sarah's example of the OC Grow initiative, or Grow@OC initiative, is very compelling how we can replicate ... We'll fall short, because nothing is the same that isn't face to face. But replicate some of those experiences through virtual residence life programming in

ways that are safe and conducive to social connection. Any responses here to these three ponderings from the participants that are on the line?

Q&A 2

Patty:

Hi, Johnny. It's Patty from Douglas College.

Johnny Morris:

Hello.

Patty:

Hi. Just thinking about this social isolation piece, I think definitely in residence that's going to be a key thing to be thinking about. But I think it's even broader than that, and we've heard I think from our students, even commuter students, that social connection piece is what they're most concerned about or what they're missing out of their university or college experience.

Patty:

So, at Douglas, we're really trying to experiment with safe ways for connecting students and helping them to make friends outside of their classroom, and then also the corresponding pieces that we've come to recognize. How do we create safe online spaces where people are being respectful of each other? There are just all of these considerations that we need to be thinking about in terms of how we support students to connect socially with each other in facilitated or self-facilitated spaces. I think that's going to be something to really share as we move forward what's working and what's not working. I would love to kind of have a space where people can share those ideas with each other.

Johnny Morris:

Thank you so much, Patty, for that broader consideration of the critical importance of social connection, and I think extending that to key target vulnerable populations that grab students who typically experience a fair degree of independence and sometimes isolation in their work and what those social spaces might look, as you note in the chat here, for academic student service leaders, teachers who are struggling. Is there an opportunity? And I think this intervention, the BCcampus intervention, is an example of bringing people together in a space for dialogue in a safe way. Thank you, Patty.

Key Questions 3

Johnny Morris:

Anyone who'd like to respond to Patty's call for greater consideration there around the importance of social connection or any other responses to the questions that you see here? Okay. Hearing none, we'll move on to the next slide, Paula, here. This is I think the final set of questions before we think through some mapping together. In the pre-brief that was sent to me, a number of folks wrote in about seeking information about tips and techniques to early recognize distress, how to cope, and I'll point to some resources at the end. Conversations about how to intervene early was a theme in those questions.

Johnny Morris:

I think this has been a struggle for campuses who have had distance learners for many years, and I think there is a repository of knowledge in those campuses that, if it hasn't already been activated, could be worth activating of how you support students in crisis and at risk of suicide. Often there's an inherent safety for educators, and I've taught at Douglas and taught at UVic, where you can more readily spot as a trained educator subtle and more-than-subtle shifts amongst your students that might indicate they're in distress. So, noticing someone who stops attending class or stops handing in assignments is a pretty bold indicator that at least a check-in conversation on the part of the TA or the prof might be helpful.

Johnny Morris:

Of course in a virtual environment, you can do some of the equivalences there, because you'll notice participation and attendance and affect in your online space potentially or your online learning environment. But I think really important to think through how campuses mobilize resources for students that are in different spaces of learning or in different communities, perhaps at some distance from physically based resources. I think that's an important consideration for us.

Johnny Morris:

Great to hear from Diana and others around this integrated approach that's been applied at some campuses around COVID impacts and teaching, for example. Would be keen to hear how your campuses are looking at financial, housing, or food insecurity through policy and relief interventions. Are graduate students on your radar as a particular population who often carry multiple duties, who might be experiencing income precarity or isolation? How are you responding to grad students? And what policy measures will you apply in relation to academic breaks, academic withdrawals, et cetera? Any responses to these questions from participants on the line?

Q&A 3

Felicity Blaiklock:

Johnny, I've just posted a question in there, and I know it's not directly related, but it's loosely related to the first question there about supporting remote students. We've recently put language onto our counseling website, because there was discussion around jurisdiction in counseling, particularly if we have counselors who were accredited by the BC Association and were looking after students who were or supporting students who were outside of BC and whether or not we were at risk of putting our counselor at risk in terms of jurisdiction. I don't know if there's anything from you or from others who've heard about that.

Johnny Morris:

Well, I think, Felicity, you're naming a very real risk, particularly from my understanding with psychologist regulation and registration. Where there is some portability there, there can be some limitations too. So, I think what you're signaling is you've started to write up some of the policy implications through the information you've put on your website, but to try and enact some of the thinking there I think is very helpful and important so that you don't hit the roadblock when a student needs service. So, if you've got a student in Saskatchewan who's a student on your roster and doing ... Because they haven't returned home or what have you. Making sure your protocol is in place is very, very helpful. I think there's learning ... Many institutions have had to deal with repatriation of students on foreign trips back to the home campus, and I think there's probably some leveraged thinking that can be done there.

Johnny Morris:

But does the point that Felicity's raise resonate with anyone else of how you're handling this remote delivery of service to people who might be out of province?

Patty:

Hi Felicity and Johnny. It's Patty again. I can just speak to how we're approaching it at Douglas. We've acknowledged the limitations for one-on-one personal counseling, but we are opening up our group psychoeducational and resilience programming to students who are out of province. So, we've tried to increase the amount of programming we're doing on that front, and also we've made sure that all of our front desks, the staff, the folks who are answering the phones, are really clear on what resources are available, like Hear2Talk, and we've got an extra layer of backup. So, if a student is in distress, we have a case manager, an associate director role, someone who can speak to them, not to offer them counseling but to help them problem solve and figure out what local resources they might be able to access. So, I think really thinking through what is still possible for students who are out of province, there are things we can still do to support them, even if we're not able to offer that one-on-one personal counseling support.

Johnny Morris:

Thank you so much, Patty. A really neat connection there with Felicity's question. Looks like Sarah at Okanagan College working on similar protocols to Douglas. Restrictions on service to only students located in BC but linking out to the Hear2Talk. And hopefully you all know about Hear2Talk, the new provincial 24/7 single-session counseling service. So, that's great knowledge sharing there. Thank you Sarah for posting that.

Johnny Morris:

Another post here. Lisa. So, some direct addressing at OC with regard to food insecurity. Lisa, would you be comfortable adding some more color to your comment or not?

Lisa:

Sure. I just wanted to share OC ... Because our culinary students typically offer food in restaurants that are closed, they've created a really great program I think they're piloting for using the food that's prepared by culinary students to serve nutritious meals to students in need. I posted the link if anyone's interested in checking that out. I think we're lucky because we have a culinary program, but I think it's just an example of some of the ways institutions can help students in innovative ways.

Planning Framework

Johnny Morris:

That's great. Thank you, Lisa. Well, what I'd ask Paula to do is maybe advance to the next slide. And feel free, as folks ponder it, to add anything into the chat. I'm mindful. We've got about another 10 minutes together. So, I do want to just cover off a couple more pieces of material and then probably signal to folks what might be possible next and what I could work with Bakht on my team through Healthy Minds and Healthy Campuses to kind of offer up some continued spaces for learning, teaching, and conversation going forward.

Johnny Morris:

So, what you see here on your screen is probably familiar to many of you. Sorry. I've got a big, large truck driving by. Probably what's familiar to many of you is work that was done several years ago in the post-secondary mental health systemic guide work that I mentioned that a number of collaborators, some of the folks around this table today, have helped on. Many of you might know that in the coming weeks the Mental Health Commission and the Standards Group and others have worked together to develop a new psychological standard for mental health amongst post-secondaries and in many ways will support campuses to enact a voluntary standard, and arguably that standard was written pre-COVID. So, it will need to be viewed through the current lens that we're operating in. So, that is pending and coming down the pipe shortly.

Johnny Morris:

But here what I'm offering up here I something that we could use collectively at a provincial level or we could use institutionally one-on-one to support a systemic, planned approach, to get back to what Felicity and I and others were saying earlier on about really co-locating a mental health response with the public health response. So, what you can see here ... We were going to do Padlets, but it would take too much time. Is something that you as a leader that you could take to a planning conversation on your campus and work through with your co-leads and with students and with faculty examples of how you're intervening with mental health in the midst of COVID-19 against each of these segments.

Johnny Morris:

So, the top of the framework really speaks to policy interventions. And Duane posed that question. Are any of you doing any adaptations? Are you addressing grading policy, for example? What will you do with academic withdrawals related to COVID related sickness? Do your existing policies, are they fit for purpose in light of that? Through to support and inclusion. So, to Sarah and Patty's comment, you're designing and implementing virtual online spaces of caring. Those are great examples of driving support and inclusion amidst a time when many folks are feeling isolated at multiple levels.

Johnny Morris:

Raising awareness. I think out of the questions I've had we at CMHA could absolutely look at a teach-in for folks around earlier recognition of distress in online teaching environments and helping point people to resources. I mean, Sarah, you might be a great collaborator on that. There may be others on the line who might want to get involved with that separately from the BCcampus work or co-aligned. Community capacity, so really looking at, this is the fourth level down, what are you doing to enhance awareness and training amongst staff and personnel about mental health. So, is there faculty education we could do, refresh? What could we learn from Diana's work there too around that enhanced capacity at a community level?

Johnny Morris:

Then the ones that I think we typically focus more on at institutions ... Self-management. Are there ways in which you can support virtual peer support and mutual aid? Could faculty members get together in a mutually supportive way? Sessional instructors. Are there things that we could pool resources around and support some of that self-management wherever your students are located? I think we've heard a lot today about accessible mental health services, so good examples. Camosun, I've publicly described their step care model that they're using to ensure that there aren't waits for counseling service. It sounds like many of you are up to similar things.

Johnny Morris:

Through to crisis management. And I think in this new virtualized world of learning and services, thinking through your crisis response, where I think many campuses are going to have to lean heavily into community-based mental health services, which I think has been always challenging, and how information sharing with students who are part of your learning community, if they're in crisis in a completely different jurisdiction. What do you do if you have a student who's involuntarily admitted to hospital in a community outside of BC because they've made a suicide attempt? And how you reintegrate them back into learning when they're well and they're out of hospital is a key consideration.

Q&A 4

Johnny Morris:

Any responses to this? I mean, does this feel like a useful framework for you? Any responses from folks on the line about this planning framework?

Patty:

I think it's a great framework. It's always worked for me in terms of ways to think about this. And it would be interesting even ... I don't know if it's possible for us to do the Padlet exercise post-webinar as a way to share ideas, because I think the more we're talking about this and bringing it back to our institutions ... One that's top of mind for me now is academic integrity. It's a huge conversation amongst faculty at the moment because of the online learning environment, and I think there are mental health considerations around that conversation that, as far as I've seen, aren't necessarily making their way into the conversation always. So, that would be an example for me of a specific area that I'd want to talk more about with folks and maybe a future BCcampus conversation that could take place.

Johnny Morris:

Well, that's great, Patty. And that whole academic integrity hadn't even emerged into my thinking. Just to think about that mental health dimension is critical. So, I think that's a lovely takeaway for Duane, myself, and the BCcampus team to find a spot to keep some of this momentum going. And many of you participate in Healthy Minds. So, I've made a note of that to think through. I think you've got some comments here from some of your colleagues here of how to manage that in this environment is huge, and the mental health impacts. Thanks so much, Patty.

Johnny Morris:

Any other responses to this framework? And would there be interest in maybe ... You could type into the box yes if you are. Would you be interested in extending this conversation and crowdsourcing together as a community your responses against these level of intervention? Would people be interested in hanging out again? I've got one yes. Yes.

Duane:

The yeses are blowing up.

Johnny Morris:

That's a blow-up of yeses. That's great. That's great. We'll get to know each other really well. That's great. Keep saying yes if you'd like to hang out.

Resources

Johnny Morris:

And, Paula, could I get you to flip to the next slide? Patty, you posed this question. I have a link ... I'll find out the ... I've had an update recently from the committee chair. I'll find out when this is going to be released into community and will alert people through into this space as well. So, Patty, we'll make sure we get an answer to your question. Paula, just the next slide here.

Johnny Morris:

I just wanted to point to a couple of resources as we wrap up today. And, Anu, we'll make sure you note your question there with regard to that, and that's a very ... And others may weigh in here just as we wrap up today to Anu's question. If any of you are seeking resources for yourselves or for your colleagues, you can click on the link in the chat. This will take you to a set of virtual mental health resources that CMHA has expanded over the pandemic response. We have BounceBack which is free for youth and adults. So, that's free. Depression and anxiety coaching care. You used to need a doctor's referral. You don't have to receive one now. For those of you who are parents or for students who are parents, we have two programs for parents with children at home with anxiety or behavioral problems. You could check out some of those resources.

Johnny Morris:

Duane's put in another link to the government's full listing of virtual mental health supports. They recently invested in community counseling. So, a whole number of neighborhood houses and family services have started to offer community counseling for folks who can't afford it ordinarily. That can offset some of the demand on campus or help with campuses that don't have in-person counseling service. So, all of that you can learn more through our website, through the first link that Duane put up, and through the government's response. There's a whole listing of services that can augment and support the incredibly valuable student services that each of you offer.

Conclusion

Johnny Morris:

I'm going to stop there, and I know we're at 2:30, just to see if there are any comments or questions whilst we wrap up, and then I'll hand it back to Duane. Maybe Paula you could just advance once more to my email so people can feel free to write. So, just one more time, Paula. Any questions or any final comments from folks? Okay. It's been a real honor to be here today, and I will huddle with Duane to find another opportunity to reconvene or extend the conversation. You can feel free to check out healthycampuses.ca if you want to be involved in our provincial network community as well. Back to you, Duane.

Ending

Duane:

Okay. Thank you so much, Johnny. We'll continue this conversation about part two of this session. There's certainly lots more to carry on with. First of all, Johnny, thanks so much for doing this. We really appreciate you taking this time. We know you are very busy at this point. And to take the time to

facilitate this session is very much appreciated. We'd also like to thank everybody else for coming to this webinar, especially considering this is the first week of class for many of you as you try to figure out how you're going to do things this fall.

Duane:

If you want access to this recording so you can share it with others, you can hit the first link. It should be posted soon. And information will be sent out to you afterwards, including the transcript from this session. As well, I'd encourage you to subscribe to the BCcampus newsletter that goes out each Wednesday if you want to be kept up to date on upcoming webinars. As I mentioned, this adapting to COVID series has been going on since the end of April with many of you returning every week. And I really appreciate seeing you here and bringing others with you.

Duane:

At this point, we'll close things down. But before I do that, I'd like to acknowledge Paula. We have a great technical team at BCcampus that helps us do this, and Paula's been there for most of these sessions. So, have a great first week as this ends for you on campus and hope to see you back again soon. Thank you.