

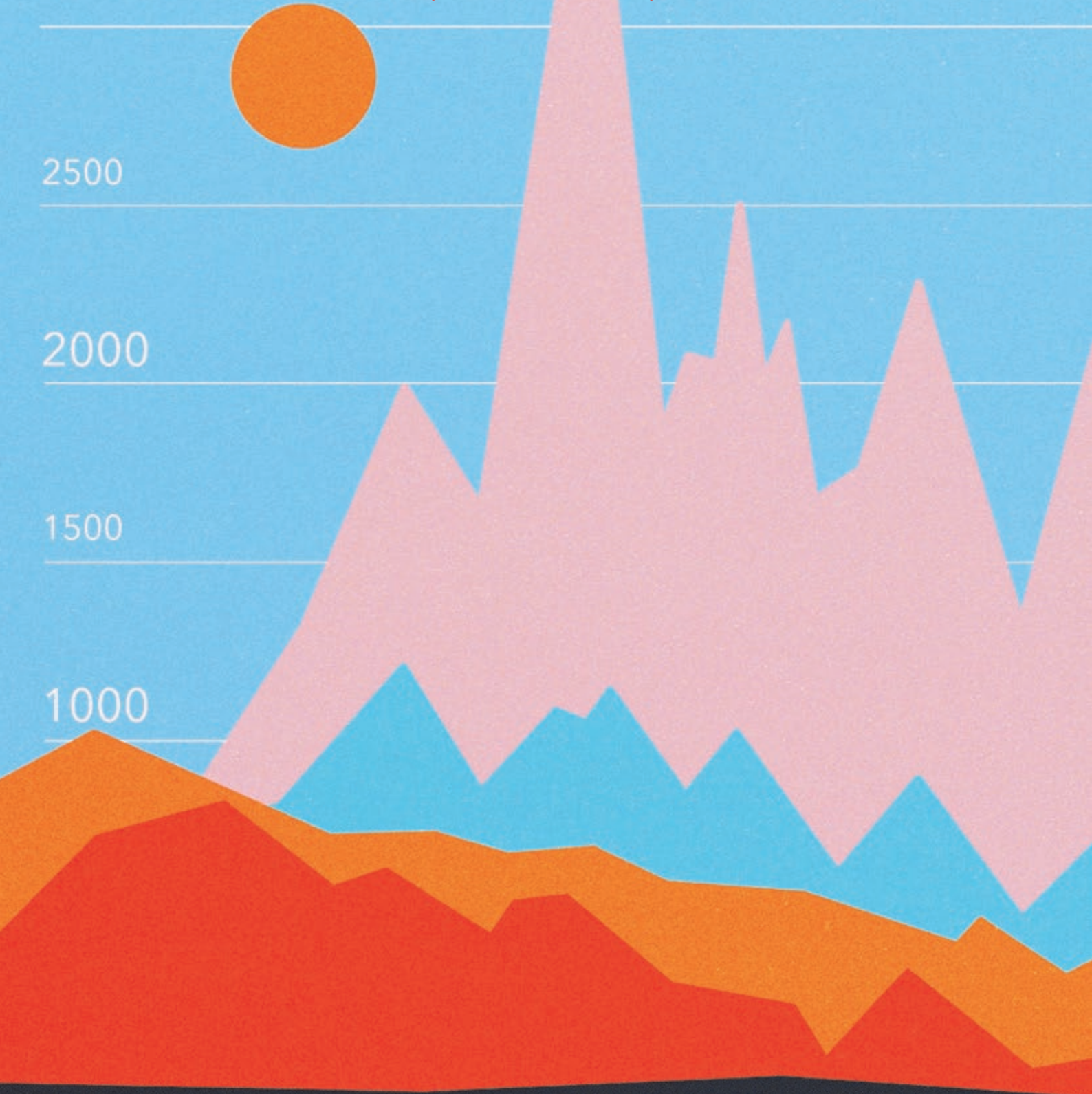
CRISIS ▶ RESPONSE

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Protection Prevention Preparedness Response Resilience Recovery



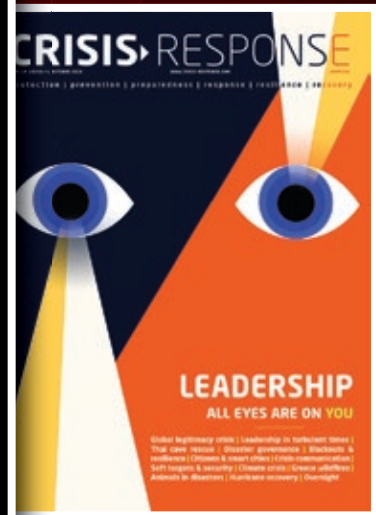
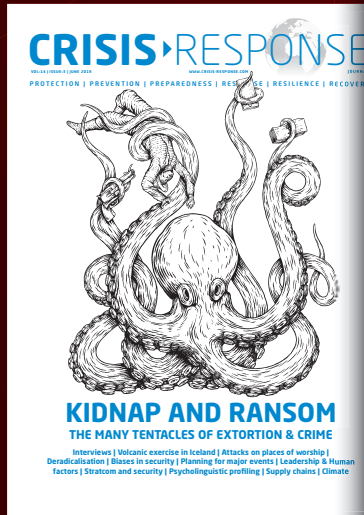
COVID-19

Emergency Management | Mental Health | Supply Chains | Economy | Business Continuity | Science on the Front Line | Attacks on First Responders | Climate

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Cover image: Gracie Broom

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Crisis have a way of exacerbating underlying vulnerabilities. Once the protective surface has been flayed from society, its pre-existing conditions are exposed and rendered more acute.



Authors in this edition warn how Covid-19 lays bare inequity, inequality and poverty; the virus is not indiscriminate. And when ingrained injustices reach a peak, righteous anger and frustration inevitably spill over into discord, presenting an opening for those who seek to profit from inflaming societal division.

The Covid-19 crisis – which has taken so many lives and wreaked such misery, fear and pain – raises questions about humanity's ability to work together against common, global threats. With a few notable exceptions, the virus seems to have caught governments on the back foot, illustrated by a failure to understand the full cascading consequences and potential systemic nature of a pandemic.

Perhaps the first mistake of many was an initial inclination to treat this as a 'health' emergency, failing to appreciate how interdependencies allow the virus to rampage across all layers of a society – from individuals and communities, to livelihoods, businesses, economies and supply chains – calling our very values and global models of co-operation into question.

Another glaring omission is evident – where is resilience? Why is the voice of emergency management unheeded by so many at the top levels of governance and the public alike? On p8, Eric Russell attempts to find answers, while on p42 Paolo Garonna explores how science and its global institutions have been devalued and exploited – to the extent of making them viewed as irrelevant in some quarters.

How are we going to cope when larger, more interconnected and destructive crises sweep our way? The answer must not lie in retreating into conflict and hostility. But we cannot come out of this as we were before, and this may be a good thing, as Marcus Coleman notes on p46. We can transform tragedy into opportunity for all. We can examine our global institutions, empowering them to act with authority and universal legitimacy, while maintaining vigilant oversight. We can place our resilience experts where they should be – trusted, experienced voices, whose knowledge is valued and respected at the very highest levels.

The alternative is to retreat into narrow, nationalistic opportunism, privilege and self-interest, sticking tiny plasters on the exposed, weeping wounds of our global society.

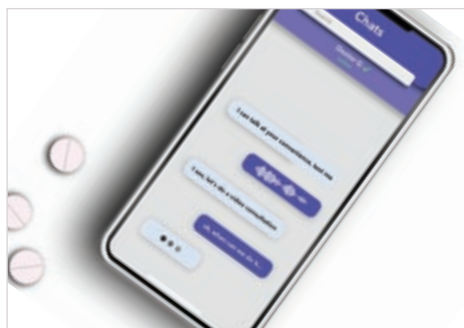
Surely we can do better than this?

Science on the front line p42



Thomas Kuhlenbeck | Ikon Images

Telemedicine innovation p70



Gracie Broom



Overcoming the mental health challenges of Covid-19

Aside from the loss of loved ones, daily deaths and the toll of working in dangerous occupations on the front line of this healthcare crisis, distancing and isolation are also deleterious to our wellbeing. What can we do to keep ourselves healthy, both physically and mentally? **Lyzi G Cota** provides some answers

Covid-19 is a watershed, life as we know it has changed. The virus has spread almost around the entire world, disrupting every aspect of our lives, including the political, social, economic, academic, physiological and psychological.

Our conversations and the information we read centre on virus detection tests, panic buying, hospital space, medical protective supplies, antibacterial gel, face masks, flattening the curve, social distancing and more. One particularly stressful factor is social distancing, which I would like to rename as 'healthy distancing'. It is not imperative to end our social life in every way; we can still keep our social interactions via telephone, video calls, messaging, email and social media.

Human beings have a rational and emotional side. The left hemisphere of the brain oversees logic, analytic thought, language, science, maths and numbers skills, and is responsible for controlling the right side of the body. On the opposite, the right hemisphere controls emotional response, encompassing creativity, imagination, intuition, holistic thought and art awareness. Stress and anxiety can impair our judgement; the two sides of the brain are not allowing us to think clearly to stay balanced.

Using logic, but remaining empathetic and calm, can save our minds from a more significant threat, one that cannot be prevented or treated with a vaccine that could cure a virus.

Covid-19 is damaging mental health among civilians and frontline workers of all kinds. And no task can be performed effectively if our mental health is being affected. Our duty as citizens, besides practising healthy distancing, is to keep our minds in good health to avoid mental stress and strain.

Contrasting & peculiar personalities

Let's be objective, practical and pragmatic so we can put things in perspective. The entire world has many advantages that it did not have when the Spanish Flu outbreak broke out in 1918. A hundred years later, we have technology and multiple, varied sources of communication. We have superior medications, more healthcare professionals, and far-reaching knowledge of protocols to deal with contagious diseases.

Emergency management professionals and crisis management leaders play a fundamental role; we need to take advantage of all of their expertise worldwide, and exploit the use of global communications to start creating a more holistic culture of preparedness.

Information, manipulated numbers on statistics, fake news and sensationalism are some of the weaknesses preying upon humankind as we go through this crisis. A responsible social media tool is a perfect asset when it comes to preparing and informing people with real facts

that can avoid mass hysteria. But social media is a double-edged sword when the news reported includes sensationalism, political views and racism, if the numbers are not correct or are manipulated to work in favour of specific interests.

The world is full of contrasting and peculiar personalities who respond differently and sometimes unpredictably to stress and crisis; hence they have different approaches regarding social distancing and isolation.

The mental health crisis this phenomenon is causing is the big elephant in the room. Along with the necessary social distancing, many people are starting to practise emotional distancing, owing to stress, depression and anxiety. This behaviour applies to patients and those who have to stay home to avoid infection, and it is also seen in frontline workers – armed forces, nurses,

paramedics, doctors, psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, law enforcement, social support workers, supermarket staff, pharmacy staff, delivery drivers, sanitation workers, cleaners, firefighters and laboratory workers.

One study conducted on healthcare workers by Korea National Health Insurance (NHI) in 2014, working under 'normal conditions' (no pandemic), reported that they were at greater risk of developing mood disorders, anxiety, sleep and psychiatric disorders.

Covid-19 has shaken the healthcare world aggressively, and its professionals are now exposed to even higher levels of psychological distress. The responsibility to keep patients healthy, calm and alive, as well as avoiding infection themselves, can be overwhelming. Frontline workers' performance is not just about going to work and finishing their schedules; they also go back home to their families with the fear that they might have been infected and that the symptoms may not have yet started to show. They must take care of patients, their loved ones

Along with the necessary social distancing, many people are starting to practise emotional distancing, owing to stress, depression and anxiety

and themselves and yet are expected to be strong, resilient, tireless, immune and resistant. These people, who come from different backgrounds, are fighting an unprecedented war every day, often without essential protection.

If each one of us is conscious and aware of our mental health, and if we start to take the ownership of our health and actions, we can begin to slow down the spread of this virus. As adults and citizens of any country, we have a civic responsibility to be socially responsible for our health to avoid facing a significant problem. We can take this time to bond more with our families and improve our health.

So, what are the threats? The casualties of this biological event are starting to disrupt all areas. Those who have died do not come from one specific sector; they were business owners, teachers, parents, grandparents, students, politicians, first responders, kids and frontline health workers – and they were all a vital part of society. No one has an idea how far this will go, and worse yet is that the virus has the potential to keep repeating each year with every cold season.

Mental stress and strain are a reaction to an aversive stimulus in our environment, preoccupation with work, lack of sleep, and as a reaction to this traumatic event. The supply chain is being interrupted, medical supplies are sold out, medical equipment is overused and frontline health workers are starting to suffer mental health consequences.

This global phenomenon has given the entire world evidence on how well or how poorly prepared we are to face an emergency of this magnitude. Few societies have genuinely created a culture of preparedness among their citizens.

It is important to remember that no task can be performed effectively if mental health is affected and under significant amounts of stress. Our duty as citizens, besides practising healthy distancing, is to keep our minds in good health. While some healthcare workers have been able to take this challenge as an opportunity and find solutions, others will inevitably develop mental health disorders that can become chronic.

These five significant types of anxiety disorders can be suffered as a result of Covid-19:

- Generalised anxiety disorder, which is characterised by chronic anxiety, tension, and exaggerated worry;
- Obsessive compulsive disorder – repetitive behaviours called compulsions and unwanted thoughts known as obsessions;
- Panic disorders – unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear, accompanied by physical symptoms that may manifest as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness, or abdominal distress;
- Post traumatic stress disorder – anxiety disorders that can develop after direct exposure to an event in which acute physical harm has occurred or been threatened, causing severe anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, and depression; and
- Social phobia, also referred to as social anxiety disorder – characterised by excessive self-consciousness and overwhelming anxiety in everyday social situations.

As many health custodians are caring for patients, their families and themselves, the burden becomes heavier; the final destiny of finances, markets, health, travel are all uncertain and highly stressful. How can healthcare providers and other hospital and clinical staff who are on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic take care of

their mental health? Here are some concrete strategies to help control and manage anxiety and stress.

Share your concerns and problems with work colleagues, clinical team members, family and friends to plan coping steps. Learning to balance demand is necessary to evaluate and define priorities, so you can plan accordingly. Write priorities down, so you do not overwhelm your mind trying to remember everything and, as soon as you achieve one, discard it from your list and move on to the next.

Waste of vital energy

Be aware of excessive stress and worrying – these are unproductive and a waste of vital energy. Your eating and sleeping habits, immune system and overall mental health can all be affected. Avoid worrying about things that are not in your power to solve and that you are not able to fix alone. If you need help, ask for it. Monitor yourself and your loved ones and pay attention to excessive fatigue, irritability, your sleep patterns, memory, libido and eating habits.

Mindful breathing exercises several times a day allow us to control emotions and be more mentally balanced, improve concentration and keep calm. Equally, mindfulness techniques help to recharge physically and emotionally, such as getting some sun, medication, yoga and even sitting in the garden.

Sustain good health habits by preparing your food to bring to work and limit alcohol consumption. And practise aerobic exercise to reduce stress – running, hiking, walking, weightlifting – do activities that you enjoy. Equally, include some time for yourself at home; watch a movie, read a book, play with your pets or games with your family or the people who live with you.

Reach out to people you haven't talked to recently but have been meaning to call; family, friends and community groups. Whether you use FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp – call everyone to encourage emotional support and functional problem solving; you can even have meals via social media to reduce isolation.

Take breaks at home and at work. A short walk during your shift break can help to calm your anxiety, boost your energy and clear your mind. Read websites and articles that talk about resilience and mental strength.

Motivate people to work as a team if they are working from home, stay emotionally connected and be empathetic. If your family is working and studying from home, establish a consistent schedule that suits everyone so that you can maintain structure, a routine and workspaces to help with focus and productivity. It is important to stay flexible and adaptable with your routines, however, and again, plan breaks so that following the schedule does not create more stress – it is challenging to adjust to a new global routine with social distancing and demand for care.

Finally, practise patience and think outside the box, especially when things do not go as planned, or if they go wrong and become chaotic.

We all need to remember that this crisis shall pass and it is, in part, our responsibility to observe the protocols and rules, and stay informed with the help of trustworthy sources to control it.

However, it also presents an opportunity to challenge ourselves, to know more about our personality, develop resilience, and grow mental strength for both physical and mental health.

Author



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