

MEDI BRIEF

JUNE 2020

Oncology limit on the Standard Care Plan

As we announced in last year October's MediBrief, as of January 2020, Standard Care Plan members have a limited oncology benefit. The oncology benefit limit is R300 000 per beneficiary over a 12-month period which, for most members, is more than enough. However, if the limit is reached, the Scheme will cover 80% of your treatment costs and, thereafter, you will contribute the remaining 20%. If you are registered for this benefit, you would have received detailed information about what this means for your treatment regime and funding. Please keep an eye on your limit and how much you are using during the year. Further, speak to your oncology case manager and check your statements. If medicines that the Scheme regards as 'innovation drugs' are prescribed as part of your treatment, a 20% co-payment and the cost in excess of the Scheme Reimbursement Rate will be for your account.

We're all in the same storm – just in different boats!

The effect of COVID-19 on our mental health

South Africa has implemented one of the strictest lockdowns to combat COVID-19. Being 'locked up' for so long has impacted all of us. Those enjoying more family time or avoiding stressful traffic are amazed by the positive effects of 'slowing down'. For others, lockdown is not as enjoyable. The lockdown's effect on people's mental health varies per age group, occupation and state of health.

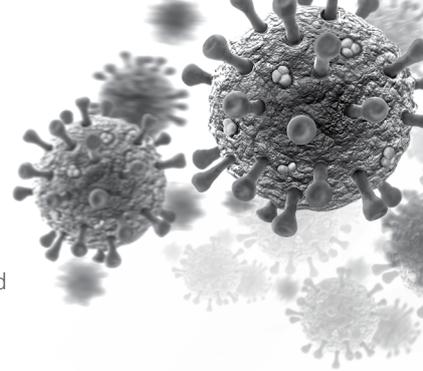
Children adapt to new situations better than adults but may pick up on parents' anxiety and fear. Returning to school will prove tricky as, pre-pandemic, parents tried to minimise online activities, encouraged play or team sports for developmental reasons and were proud if a child showed empathy through hugging. Now, the reverse is true: children can't touch one another; must avoid team sports; can't handle library books and must remain 1.5 meters apart at all times. While anxiety can result in bad behaviour, talking to your child to understand said behaviour is important.

Being a **teenager or young adult** is already hard enough with trying to make sense of the world while undergoing hormonal changes. Teenagers are supposed to develop social skills by engaging with their peers, while emotionally 'separating' from parents. For now, they are 'locked up' with their parents and forced to engage with a 'fake-feeling' online world. For many, the most painful part will be missing out on important experiences: matric dance, 18th and 21st birthday parties or a weekend road-trip with friends. Not being able to see girl- or boyfriends means stress is their reality. Give them room to share their feelings, listen without judgment and recognise and accept their disappointments.

Adults are overwhelmed with juggling home-schooling, supporting parents, siblings and friends, learning new IT skills, attending boardroom meetings from home, job uncertainty or, worse, income loss. Healthcare and essential workers deal with unbearable pressure and direct danger to their lives while others in beauty, hospitality or similar industries can't fathom when they might see their next salary. Add to this the everlasting guilt of not being able to do enough while knowing so many South Africans are starving during lockdown. This is enough to unbalance even the most stable individual. Not being able to exercise, socialise or simply let off some steam with friends around a braai is, in some cases, leading to frustration or even domestic violence. Suicide rates have also climbed during this time and we would encourage anyone experiencing these kinds of negative thoughts to seek help.

Senior citizens and the elderly tend to have pre-existing medical conditions as well as an increased risk of experiencing psychological distress when access to care becomes limited or when social distancing, quarantine and isolation are required. On top of this, they may face an unplanned retirement scenario at a stage in their lives where one should be travelling or seeing loved ones. Some, about to retire, may have lost businesses they spent their lives building and others possibly a huge proportion of their pension funds. At this stage of life, it seems too late to restart, leaving feelings of utter helplessness and hopelessness. Adapting to a new world of video chats and online shopping is just not easy. Elderly people might, understandably, not be patient, interested and energetic enough to learn new tech skills. Their worries during this time are real and justified.

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We all have emotions of fear, sadness, loneliness, depression, anger or irritation – just in different amounts and for different reasons.

Members with previous mental health issues are of concern to us too. Mental health requires a steady routine, social interaction and avoiding stress triggers – all of which seem outlandish during a pandemic. Like other chronic conditions, it is vital to manage mental health conditions diligently. Watch out for new or worsened symptoms and don't wait to speak to your doctor if you feel different.

What can we do for ourselves and others?

- This storm shall pass. The birds are still singing, the wind still blows. A new dawn will break.
- Congratulate yourselves, coming this far means you will see this through to the end.
- Be kind, compassionate and tolerant. Understand that everybody fights a different fight.
- Don't judge or stigmatise infected people. Encourage them to take care of themselves.
- Check in on friends and family, especially the more vulnerable. Adopt a granny if you can, call a neighbour or even become part of a support group.
- Be kind to yourself. Know that even the strongest among us are affected by this pandemic.
- Consume social media and news in small doses and only from reputable sources. Think before sharing news. Avoid sensational articles.
- Check yourself and loved ones for signs of mental struggles: fatigue, withdrawal, sleep irregularities, substance abuse, negativity, loss of interest, concentration problems, etc.
- Try a new hobby or improve your cooking, gardening or writing skills. Become creative again, free your imagination and do what you can to make yourself happy.
- Go outdoors. Boost your mood and immune system with fresh air and sunshine. Exercise is proven to be effective in mild forms of depression. Try the free online exercise programmes and remember to get up and walk around at least every hour.
- Ask for help. It's okay to feel overwhelmed or concerned about COVID-19 and its impact on your life. Reach out to support groups like SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group) – a non-profit organisation that can give support for various challenges. They offer support groups as well as free telephonic counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 0800 70 80 90 for their depression and anxiety line or find more info at sadac.org

Don't be fooled – there is only one way to test for COVID-19

Don't buy into online information about self-tests for COVID-19 that seem cheap and promise a quick and accurate result.

"Whatever claims you read online about quick-results, finger-prick and self-test kits, please be aware that a proper test conducted through a registered pathology laboratory is the only option you should consider reliable," says Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Discovery Health's Head of the Centre for Clinical Excellence.

COVID-19 is diagnosed with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) molecular test which investigates a sample taken from a patient's respiratory tract, identifying viral particles. The laboratories to whom healthcare providers submit these tests include the following:

- PathCare
- Lancet
- Ampath
- Vermaak and Partners

On 25 March 2020, the National Pathology Group (NPG) released a statement regarding approved COVID-19 test kits in South Africa.

According to their statement, point-of-care or rapid test kits for COVID-19 testing are currently not approved for use. Their results are unreliable and would still need to be confirmed with a formal laboratory test. Reliance on these test kits would worsen the spread of COVID-19 as those who receive false negative results would not know to self-isolate and therefore continue to spread the infection. Further, there are no officials going door to door, from home to home, offering to test you and your family for COVID-19. This is likely a scam. Only doctors can request the COVID-19 test for their patients.

To gain access to testing, your doctor must find that you meet certain clinical criteria. These criteria are based on guidelines set out by the World Health Organization and the South African National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

"Remember that you do not need to test for COVID-19 if you have no symptoms and are just looking for reassurance that you are healthy. It's crucial that a medical doctor guides you towards testing", adds Dr Nematswerani. "It is impossible to test everyone and crucial that we ensure that we make test kits available to those healthcare providers and patients who really need them."

Visit www.angloms.co.za to learn more about your Scheme and benefits.

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