



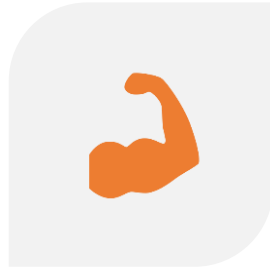
An Introduction to NI's Interim Mental Health Champion

Professor Siobhan O'Neill

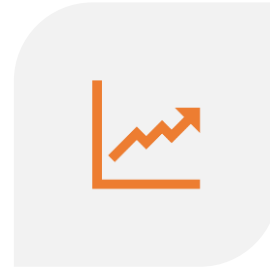
Webinar plan



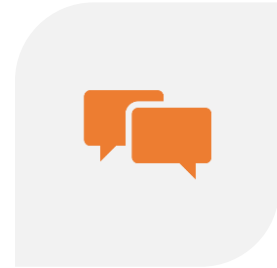
MY ROLE



COPING DURING
COVID-19



LEADERSHIP &
GROWTH



Q & A

The Role of Mental Health Champion

- **Public Advocate.**
- **Professional bodies, academia, campaign groups, community and voluntary groups.**
- **Policy Influence.**
- **Network Hub.**

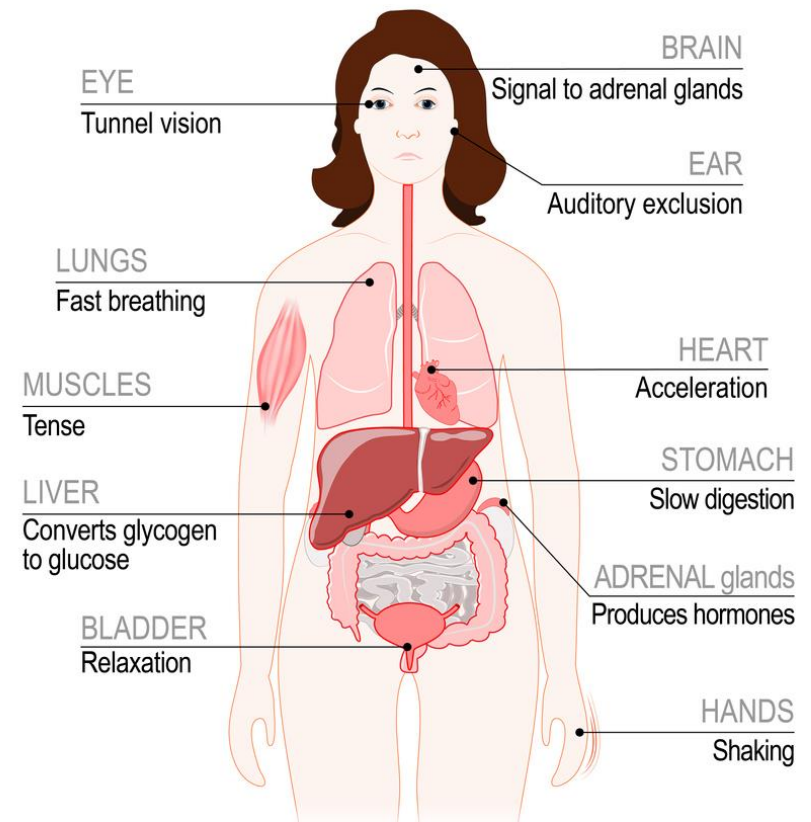
Stress and loss in a pandemic

- Keeping ourselves safe. Fear.
- Keeping others safe. Worry.
- Loss of contact, community & connection.
- Managing changes to our routines.
- Isolation causes stress – missed contact.
- Impact of loss of life, health & livelihood.
- Witnessing the broader impact in our community, in our countries, globally.
- Uncertainty about the future.



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Fight-or-flight response



Normal Effects of Stress



Thinking (cognitive): easily distracted, difficult to concentrate, difficulty remembering things.



Emotional: Trouble relaxing, feeling irritable, feeling anxious & threatened.



Physical: Increase or decrease in energy, body tension, feeling restless, sweating, easily startled, changes in appetite, difficulty sleeping.



Social: Wanting to be alone, blaming others or getting into arguments.


Circuits of Survival

Subconscious somatic perception of danger triggers a dropdown.

We move back up when threat has passed (acceptance). Emotional regulation.

Repeated trauma → re-calibration of thresholds for each stage.





The Neuroscience of Community

- We are a social species.
- Our neuroception is attuned to the state of other mammals.
- We subconsciously mirror the survival states (cues) from other mammals in the herd.
- If one animal senses danger the others are on high alert - increases the chance of survival of the group.
- Calmness, safety and a sense of wellbeing are also contagious.

Coping in a pandemic

- Know that it is ok to feel anxious, this is a normal response (self-kindness).
- Seek support, using creative methods, from a range of (helpful) sources.
- Practice gratitude and promote hope (written & visual activities).
- Media and news create stress, control your exposure.
- Set and celebrate achieving small manageable goals (larger goals/ core values).
- Manipulate your body into safe and social (exercise, movement, repetitive sensory actions).
- Do things that give you pleasure.



What may make things worse?

- Monitor the impact of particular stress management strategies on your mental health.
- Impulsive or high-risk behaviour that reduces stress in the short-term only (excessive spending, gambling, etc.).
- Substances: tobacco, alcohol, and/or drugs.
- Constant worrying (thinking repeatedly) about the risks or negative consequences of *COVID-19* (different from preparing).
- Co-ruminating (worrying out-loud with others) can lead to increased intensity of strong emotions.






Maximise your capacity to cope

- Healthy food (sugar, alcohol, caffeine).
- Physical activity.
- Modify your expectations.
- **(Re)establish your core values.**
- Problem-solve and set achievable goals.
- Accept unhelpful emotions and refocus your attention on activities that are aligned with your core values.
- Maintain daily routines.
- Increase positive coping behaviours that have worked for you in the past.
- Cognitive re-structuring: “this is a terrible time” → “this is a terrible time, but I can get through this.”



What do we need from leaders?

- Role modelling (self-care & self-compassion).
- Selective authentic vulnerability.
- Information that we can trust.
- Accessibility.
- Attention and empathy.
- Support to problem solve.
- Flexibility.



What have
we learnt
already?



Money can be found

Populations can adapt

Innovation is possible

Social agency is possible

Solidarity

Science can guide progress

Things that we thought were impossible....

A large, stylized circular graphic composed of concentric rings. The left half of the circle is a solid blue color, and the right half is a solid green color. The rings are slightly offset, creating a layered effect.

Q & A